

2008-E-17

**Trends in International Higher Education and Regionalism:
Issues and Challenges for Malaysia**

Prof. Dr. Morshidi Sirat
Director

National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN)

Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia

email: morshidi@usm.my

January 2009

Preface Asian Regional Integration and Education

Set against the backdrop of increasing economic interdependence in the Asia region, the idea of ‘regional integration’ is most often articulated as a policy instrument and political ideal. Arguably, this objective is being pursued to further promote regional competitiveness in the world economy and to bring about a new stable political order. Nevertheless, any move in this direction has been repeatedly challenged from perspectives that emphasize socio-cultural diversity in the region and shared histories. It is in this context that Waseda University received the Global COE research grant from the Ministry of Education of Japan. Waseda University was tasked with establishing the Graduate Institute for Asian Regional Integration (GIARI) to investigate problems and prospects relating to Asian regional integration. Issues of education are central to any dialogue that seeks to further integrate political, social, and economic systems in the region. Taking European integration as a precursor, it is clear that education plays a critical role in the integration process. It is certainly, therefore, within the purview and moreover, a responsibility of Waseda’s Global COE—sponsored research to examine the role education will continue to play in a more comprehensive integration of the Asia region.

There is not a single nexus of research where the study of Asian regional integration and education meet; rather, there exist a diversity of approaches that form a matrix of research. A first feature of regional integration studies is the empirical study of ‘de facto’ integration of the region’s education systems. From this approach, we conclude that education systems, economic systems and societal values are already intertwined and integrated to a certain degree. This first approach endeavors to take stock of the extent of actual integration. A second approach emphasizes the purpose(s) and governing principles which inform the integration process. It may then be possible to derive ordered conceptual frameworks that reveal future pathways of regional cooperation and integration. This approach asks why we need to integrate and the answers come mainly from historical and philosophical investigations of policy arguments. The third type of regional integration studies attempt to analyze existing frameworks and institutions for regional cooperation and integration of education systems. It is a political analysis that reveals practical and organizational implications for future regional cooperation and integration processes. The fourth approach focuses on the study of the actors involved in the regional integration process. Countries and governments are probably the most important actors in these processes, but educational institutions are also important. The fifth approach is best described as the comparative study of regional integration drawing on experiences from different regions; education regionalization in Europe, for example.

In doing these researches, we must share a vision concerning Asian regional integration and education that can foster mutual trust and a concept of people’s Asia, and strengthening the competitiveness of Asian human resources in the world. By comprehensively discussing and internalizing diverse views, rather than relying on a single model or ideal, it will be possible to build a regional framework for education in Asia that can be expected to contribute greatly to the formation of an Asian Community, and thus, to peace and prosperity in the region.

Kazuo KURODA, Ph.D.
Leader, Education and Asian Regional Integration
Research Group, GIARI

Abstract:

This paper outlines some salient trends in international higher education and examines how regionalism in Asia will influence and shape the current and future transformation of the higher education system in Malaysia. The main theme of this paper revolves around the issues and challenges for Malaysia arising from a higher education landscape in Asia which is based on regionalism. How will Malaysia respond to such development? While it is generally assumed that regionalism in Asia will help shape the formation of collaboration and cooperation among institutions of higher learning in this region, are we thinking of an Asian Higher Education Area in the near future?

Admittedly, the idea of regional cooperation and integration in Asia is not a new one. In the 1990s, in the midst of the debilitating Asian financial crisis, Dr Mahathir's proposal for an East Asian Economic Community (EAEC), gained considerable attention from policy makers in Asia, particularly in East Asia, who shared similar vision and aspiration. Mahathir, who was the Prime Minister of Malaysia at the time, was very strong in his belief of shared Asian values. Maybe this is an opportune time to think of using higher education as a vehicle for constructing regionalism in Asia, similar to that which has been applied in Europe (European Higher Education Area). One compelling reason for this is the rise of Asia.

Introduction and Context

A survey of the literature on higher education in the last few years points to an increasing interest in international higher education. Kezar (2000) observes a growing number of journals that focus on international (higher) education with Europe, North America and Australia well represented, but Asia is also becoming increasingly prominent in the literature. It appears that “Asia is hot” (Rubin 2007) and the world is “adapting to the Asian Century” (Murphy 2007). These journals are concerned with cross-cultural comparisons of common concerns (Kezar 2000), and based on such an approach we could then say that the focus on international higher education is primarily about a comparative analysis of higher education issues of common concerns within a cross-cultural framework.

Admittedly, there are many interpretations of higher education issues of “common concern”, but in this paper we are interested in two specific issues: (1) higher education that transcends national borders through the exchange of human resources (typically expressed in terms of transnational or cross border education), and (2) a higher education framework that prepares graduates for an interconnected world, buttressed by a highly globalised economy. These issues are considered to be of importance because we see two important trends becoming gradually more evident: an increasing number of students are going abroad for their higher education, and the need for graduates to work overseas. Indeed, it has been observed that in many nations, concern has grown over issues such as supplying the corporate sector with graduates who possess the skills necessary to function efficiently and effectively in a highly globalised world, which is growing in technological sophistication (Forest n.d.: 3). In fact, according to UNESCO (2006), students going abroad are the most visible form of international higher education. Analysts of higher education have noted that open or distance education is an important component of international higher education. While there are several initiatives in this area, it is still too early to assess their overall impact on the current orientation of international higher education.

While the international element is already an accepted development in the world of higher education, the rise of regionalism in connection with higher education is a new and interesting phenomenon. Inter-regionalism is on the rise, particularly between Europe and Asia. Arguably, according to Robertson (2007 citing Ravenshill 2005), regionalism could be simply defined as a formal inter-governmental collaboration and this could involve two or more states. In other words, regionalism is about formal economic cooperation and economic arrangements of a group of countries aimed at facilitating or enhancing regional integration (Lamberte 2005:4). Regionalisation on the other hand is a process involving an integration that arises from a combination of markets, private trade and investment flows, the policies and decisions of companies or organisations, along with state-led initiatives (Hurrell 1995, cited in Robertson 2007: 3). Notably, the definition of regionalism cited above would necessarily open up avenues and opportunities for other sectors in the economy (such as higher education) to be drawn into the process of promoting and producing collaboration and cooperation in a region (Robertson 2007). Ideally, therefore, regionalism in higher education must be seen as arising from an emergent sense of collective identity and purpose. At this juncture, however, it is also important to note that, according to Forest (n.d), economic regionalism may be a precursor to the development of educational regionalism. For instance, in Europe, regionalism in the form of the European Union has become an impetus for educational reform in member countries. Interestingly, Forest (n.d) argues that economic and educational regionalisms are perhaps the necessary steps on the path towards true internationalisation of economic and educational policies.

This paper outlines some salient trends in international higher education and the increasing tendency towards regionalism and inter-regionalism in relation to higher education). Subsequently, this paper will examine how regionalism in Asia is expected to influence and shape the transformation of the higher education system in Malaysia. Malaysia has recently released two important documents on higher education, namely, *the National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2020*, and *the National Higher Education Action Plan, 2007-2010*. Obviously, more work needs to be done in this area, and this

paper does not do justice to this very interesting area of research. However, in the limited space available, our primary concern in this paper is with issues and challenges for Malaysia arising from a higher education landscape in Asia which is based on regionalism, as defined earlier on in this paper. What follows is a series of questions that this paper seeks to address. How will Malaysia respond to regionalism in higher education? While it is generally assumed that regionalism in Asia will help shape collaboration and cooperation among institutions of higher learning in this region and with other regional blocks in Europe in particular, are we thinking of an Asian Higher Education Area in the near future? What are the possibilities and limitations to this idea?

It is important to realise that the idea of regional cooperation and integration in Asia is not a new one. In the 1990s, in the midst of the debilitating Asian financial crisis, Dr Mahathir's proposal for an East Asian Economic Community (EAEC), gained considerable attention from policy makers in Asia, particularly in East Asia, who shared a similar vision and aspiration. Mahathir's idea was deeply entrenched in Asia's sense of common destiny and purpose in times of crisis. Mahathir, who was the Prime Minister of Malaysia at the time, was very strong in his belief of shared Asian values.

Given the global trend toward regionalism (in Latin America, South Asia, etc.) this may be an opportune time to think of using higher education as a vehicle for constructing regionalism in Asia, similar to that which has been applied in Europe (that is, the European Higher Education Area). One compelling reason for doing this now is the rise of Asia. However, without a precursor (such as an Asian Economic Union or something similar in nature and function), can we hope for significant progress towards the development of resource sharing, student and academic/research personnel circulation, and other bi-lingual or tri-lingual educational programmes in Asia?

Trends in International Higher Education

The literature has highlighted several important trends in international higher education, particularly in the 1990s. International student mobility is projected to increase

further and the nature of student mobility is changing from the conventional and prescribed models (which is very costly) to broad and commoditized models, in line with the demands and requirements of a market-driven higher education system. It will be made clear later in this paper that the relative composition of sending (source) and receiving (host) countries has changed, the focus now being on Asia. It is generally assumed that, based on this trend, the shift to Asia will continue in the future.

Even though there are a lot of assumptions and predictions regarding the position of the USA as a major player in the international student markets post-9/11, the fact remains that the USA is still a major competitor in the international higher education landscape. However, because of 9/11, countries in the Middle East are beginning to invest substantially in higher education infrastructures and at the same time are inviting reputable universities from the west to operate and offer international degrees locally. Arguably, international higher education is becoming very complex in terms of provision and markets.

Delving into the specific details of the trends noted earlier, according to Verbik and Lasanowski (2007), international student mobility has, over the past 10-15 years, become an increasingly important part of the international higher education landscape, with the number estimated to have reached more than 2.7 million in 2005 (about 61% increase since 1992). Obviously, projection figures vary but the fact remains that international higher education is expanding. Based on the figures provided by Verbik and Lasanowski (2007), the scale of international higher education becomes very clear. For instance, more than 90% of international students have enrolled in institutions in countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) with the main destinations (the US, the UK, Germany, France and Australia) recruiting over 70% of them. The authors also note that significant year-on-year growth was recorded in the late 1990s and early 2000s in most of the main English-language destinations, with major source countries such as China and India providing a large number of enrolments each year. Incidentally, the USA is regarded as a very large international competitor (with a capacity of more than 500,000 students for international higher education), followed by the UK, Germany, France and Australia, considered as

large (150,000-500,000) international competitors. Interestingly, Malaysia, on her own, is considered as a medium level competitor in the international landscape, with a capacity for 25,000-150,000 international students.

In the context of this paper, the rise of Asia is an important element that needs to be factored in when analysing the trends in international higher education. According to Lamberte (2005:6), analysts have indicated that Asia will become a dominant producer/consumer in all sectors of the world economy by 2030. It is also suggested that “the stimulus for Asia’s growth in the future will have to increasingly come from within” (Lamberte 2005:7), and this could be taken as a cue for a movement or shift towards regionalism with an eye towards cooperation or integration in Asia.

In the arena of higher education, Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) reported that the global demands for higher education are estimated to increase from 97 million in 2000 to 263 million in 2025, and it is important to note that China and India alone will account for over half of the total global demand by 2025. Other estimates on the role of Asia in the expansion of international higher education are similarly dramatic. According to Verbik and Lasanowski (2007 citing Bohm 2003), Asia was thought to have by far the greatest growth potential and was expected to account for 70% of the global demand in 2025. Not surprisingly though, within Asia, India and China were identified as the main growth markets and estimated to account for 50% of the global demand for international higher education in 2025. The British Council’s study (2004, cited in Verbik and Lasanowski 2007) projected that overall demand for international higher education in the UK would increase from 2.1 million places in 2003 to approximately 5.8 million by 2020 and in the context of this increase, it is important to note once again the role of Asia in surging demand for student places. This situation is also true for Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the USA.

In trying to comprehend the reasons for the trends noted above, Altbach (2004:1) singles out the fact that industrialised countries are recognizing the need to provide their students with a global consciousness and with experience in other countries in order for

them to compete in the global economy. In this respect, Altbach (2004) specifically singled out the European Union (EU), which has instituted policies that have increased the numbers of students studying outside of their home countries within the Union. He argues further that the numbers of transnational students will surge dramatically with the expansion of the EU and the implementation of the “Bologna initiatives” which will see a harmonisation of academic structures within the European Union. Healey (2007), however, notes that among the universities in the mainly English speaking destination countries the upsurge in recruitment of international students may be primarily the result of government intervention and policy, which continue to regulate domestic tuition fees but critically deregulate international tuition fees. On the demand side, Healey (2007) attributes the phenomena to the excess demand for higher education within fast-growing developing countries.

It is important to recognise that despite the above estimates noted on the growth of international higher education in the UK, Canada, Australia and the USA, there have been noticeable changes in international mobility patterns. The Almanac of Higher Education 2004-5 (2005, cited in Verbik and Lasanowski 2007) attributed these changes partly to the post- 9/11 international climate, the higher costs associated with overseas study, increased competition in the market and enhanced opportunities in the home countries of many students (due to significant investments in the expansion of domestic capacity and increased import of transnational provision).

In the context of this paper, it is interesting to note Verbik and Lasanowski’s (2007), classification of countries involved in international higher education, either as sending or receiving countries. Specifically on current and emerging international student mobility trends, they have identified countries involved as follows:

- The Major Players: the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Australia;
- The Middle Powers: Germany and France;
- The Evolving Destinations: Japan, Canada and New Zealand; and
- The Emerging Contenders: Malaysia, Singapore and China.

Here we are interested in the category “Emerging Contenders”, comprised primarily of Asian countries, namely Malaysia, Singapore and China. According to Verbik and Lasanowski (2007), Malaysia, Singapore and China have a combined share of approximately 12% of the global student market with somewhere between 250,000 and 300,000 students having decided to pursue higher education studies in these countries in 2005-6. In this respect, Malaysia, on her own is considered as a medium scale competitor, but was elevated to large scale competitor status when combined with Singapore and China. It is important to be reminded that in terms of student numbers, China has experienced a particularly rapid growth, but because each nation has taken active measures to develop strategic initiatives to recruit overseas students, all of them have dramatically increased their competitiveness in a rapidly changing market (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007).

Trends in Regionalism

According to Ahmad (2003:1), the history of regionalism is usually divided into two phases: old regionalism, which took place in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and new regionalism, which describes the phenomenon in the 1980s, 1990s and onwards. The rise of new regionalism marked the shift from protectionism to liberalisation in a global market situation; old regionalism was “inherently discriminatory against the rest of the world, and focused on increasing competitiveness within a region by emphasising intra-regional trade and security” (Ahmed 2003:1). As such, regional blocks based on old regionalism “tended to take place between countries at the same level of development (the EU, for example before its expansion to include emerging economies in Eastern Europe) and were driven by government-built institutions” (Ahmed 2003:1).

The new regionalism reflects a changing global market situation as a result of the globalisation of economic activities and trade, reflected in the emerging paradigm of economic liberalisation and market deregulation, which is usually aimed at increasing

competitiveness. Good examples of new regionalism are Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), a very loose grouping of states on both sides of the Pacific, and ASEAN, in which most countries trade more outside the region than within it. However, there are more instances of inter-regionalism since the middle 1990s, reflecting the real global market circumstance. The Europe/Asia relationship established in late 1960s was formalised in the late 1980s and subsequently, a new organisation, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), was created in 1996 (Robertson 2007). Dialogue and cooperation, in particular inter-regionalism initiatives between EC, EU and ASEAN, is conducted within the framework of this inter-regional set-up. It is within this inter-regional framework that we have examples of initiatives and key mechanisms put in place specific to higher education. ERASMUS, SOCRATES, the Bologna Agreement, the EU-US Trans-Atlantic Agenda, ERASMUS MUNDUS, Asia-Link, and the EU-ASEAN University Network Programme (AUNP) are good examples of key mechanisms to take Europe-Asia cooperation forward. Lenn (2004:1) further underscores the connection between higher education and the tendency towards regionalism as follows:

National higher education systems are not immune to the dynamics of regionalism. To the contrary, higher education by its basic nature of inquiry has traditionally sought to respond to changing circumstances nationally and has looked beyond the limits of national borders to seek new truths and ways in which the educational enterprise can continuously improve it. With the rise of regionalism and an increased sense of their status in the global marketplace, countries are recognizing the critical role played by higher education in economic development.

ASEAN has for several decades explored collaboration in higher education between member states and UNESCO. Before this, the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning (ASAIHL), the Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO), including SEAMEO's Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development (RIHED) are some of examples of ASEAN's leading role in multi-level higher education. Increasingly, however, these collaborations are established with Northeast Asia primarily for the advancement of a common vision of higher education (de Prado Yepes 2007:88). De

Prado Yepes (2007:90) also observes that as the regional higher education processes converge they could also serve as an example to other regional processes around the world. What we have seen is the emergence of new regionalism in higher education, different from the old regionalism that has given rise to a regional block in Europe.

It has been argued that the death of nationalistic fervour is a precursor to regional cooperation towards economic and social objectives. Some factors contributing to this shift are globalisation of capital, rapidly expanding international human mobility, as well as faculty and foreign student exchanges (Forest n.d. :3).

International Higher Education – Malaysia’s Response to Opportunities and Challenges

Student Mobility – Malaysia as a source country

In the case of the USA, a major player in the international education market, it has been noted that Asia has been a particularly strong source region, with 327,785 students from more than 30 different countries having decided to study in the USA in 2006. The figure mentioned accounts for 58% of the country’s total 2006 international student intake. Interestingly, of the 30-odd Asian nations which send students to the USA annually, Malaysia was in the “top ten source countries” between 1997 and 1999. From 2000 onwards, substantially fewer Malaysians have been going to the USA and by 2006 the number plummeted to 5,515 (Table 1). A security crackdown in the USA, in particular harsher visa restrictions and fear of harassment, is generally cited as the main contributing factor to this decline in numbers of Malaysians studying in the USA.

A substantial decline in the flow of Malaysian students to the UK has also been reported; although this decline is less dramatic compared to the situation in the USA. While still in the top ten as a source country for the UK, the student numbers have dropped from 18,015 in 1997 to 10,005 in 2001, only to rise again to 11,450 in 2006 (Table 2). The decline in student numbers which began in 1998 is partly attributable to

the high cost of higher education in the UK. At a time when the cost of an overseas education was rising steeply, Malaysia was experiencing the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis. In order to reduce the outflow of funds, the government intervened by expanding the capacity of the local (private) higher education sector. The rise in student flows to the UK after 2002 was attributable to sending sponsored students to the UK to pursue higher degrees and other professional courses for which places are very limited locally.

The Malaysian student presence in Australia is very strong, with 18,074 in 2006, and as a source country it is third in importance after China and India (Table 3). It is tempting to relate the decline in student flow to Australia in 1999 and 2002 to the effect of the Asian financial crisis and September 11 respectively.

Evidently, the so-called ‘main English-speaking destination countries’ - USA, the UK and Australia - are the main destinations for students from Malaysia, while Germany and France are not particularly important. The number of Malaysian students in East Asia is also small.

Student mobility – Malaysia as a receiving country

As a receiving country, Malaysian international higher education has only recently emerged as a contender in the market for students in the Asian region in particular. Based on Verbik and Lasanowski’s (2007) analysis, Malaysia has approximately a 2% share of the international student market, with around 55,000 foreign students enrolled in the country’s higher education institutions in 2006. Traditionally, the large majority of them have come from the neighbouring Asian countries of Indonesia, Thailand, Bangladesh, the Maldives, Singapore and, overwhelmingly, China. Malaysia, it appears, has profited from being considered a desirable and highly competitive alternative to other countries in Southeast Asia. Private higher education institutions in Malaysia have been successful in recruiting students in key Asian markets (including the Middle East). But, the percentage of foreign students at private higher education

institutions varies markedly. For instance, INTI University College has no less than 60% of its foreign student population from China. Among public higher education institutions however, it is important to realise that enrolments of foreign students are capped at 5% of total enrolment in undergraduate but not in postgraduate programmes. This has led to a noticeable and steady growth of postgraduate and doctoral students in many public universities. Malaysia has set a target of 100,000 foreign students by 2010 and related strategies and programmes have been put in place to achieve this target.

Based on the analysis provided by Verbik and Lasanowski (2007), it becomes immediately evident that over the past decade, on average, Chinese students are believed to have accounted for approximately 35% of Malaysia's total overseas student enrolments each year, presumably as a result of the geographical proximity between the two countries. Verbik and Lasanowski (2007), pointed out that student mobility between Malaysia, Singapore and China is considerable because of socio-cultural and linguistic similarities between them.

More recently, however, Malaysia has experienced a decline in the number of Chinese students enrolling in Malaysian institutions, but the numbers of international students from Middle Eastern countries has been increasing steadily. Arguably, this is due to China allocating substantial resources towards the development of its own higher education system and in light of the country's investment, Chinese mobility patterns to Malaysia appear to be changing. Malaysian recruiters have widened their market search for international students by targeting many countries in the Middle East including the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon and as a result of these efforts the number of students from the Arab world at Malaysia's International Islamic University (which uses both Arabic and English as the medium of instruction) has been growing steadily since September 11, 2001 (Sedgwick 2004).

Higher education framework

A higher education framework that prepares graduates for an interconnected world and a highly globalised economy is a second issue of great concern for Malaysia. Malaysia, like many other countries in Asia aspiring to be an important node in the global network, needs to prepare global-ready graduates for a workforce that requires inter- and multi-cultural competencies, which will ensure success in dealing with problems and threats that have come about from the advance of globalisation. These “global workforce development” initiatives (Bremer 2006) could be realised through changes in the priorities and objectives of higher educational institutions in Malaysia. Admittedly, while higher educational institutions in Malaysia have been embarking on important changes in governance structures since late 2006 (Abdul Razak, Sarjit and Morshidi 2007) these changes are not extensive enough to create an impact in terms of GWD objectives. Of particular importance for higher educational institutions to consider and implement is “a pivotal international educational experience” in the curricula (Bremer 2006).

Malaysia acknowledges the need to provide students with a global consciousness and with experience in other countries in order for them to compete in the global economy but the country has not been able to take concrete steps in this direction. For instance, the Economic Planning Unit and the World Bank (2007) have pointed out that in the case of Malaysia, graduates are supposed to have several qualities as follows: (a) have mastered specialized knowledge and can apply that knowledge to practice, (b) have developed complex cognitive abilities (e.g., analytical thinking, problem-solving, reasoning, etc.), strong communication skills in more than one language, and literacy in the use of technologies (c) have the desire and ability to engage in life-long learning, and (d) will be able to make meaningful contributions to the advancement of their local community, their country, and the world. Being able to find employment in the global market has not been emphasised enough in the Malaysian higher education curricula, to the extent that it is generally assumed that Malaysians graduating from Malaysian higher educational institutions are not able to secure employment outside of Malaysia. Interestingly, there are opportunities for Malaysians who have completed their postgraduate studies overseas to secure employment in the country where they graduated. Many countries, particularly members of the OECD, have already taken pro-active

measures to liberalize their immediate access to work, amend migration policies to facilitate their postgraduate stay, and provide subsequent opportunities for conversion to permanent residence (Hawthorne 2007). According to Healey (2007), Australia is one country which has redesigned immigration regulations to increase relative weightings given to qualification from Australian *vis-à-vis* foreign educational institutions in assessing a potential immigrant's suitability for admission.

While the government has commissioned several studies to re-assess the higher education framework, the recommendations have yet to be implemented fully. The challenge for the government is to strike a "fine balance between two competing objectives: expanding the system and improving quality" (Economic Planning Unit and the World Bank 2007: 15). In this respect, while the Private Higher Education Institutions Act (1996) was successful in expanding the higher education system in Malaysia (Morshidi 2006), resulting in a diversified higher education provision in Malaysia, the quality of higher education has to be realigned in terms of internationally accepted criteria and standards for academic programmes and educational experiences. Ideally, the outcome of this quality realignment exercise should be global-ready graduates.

The Malaysian government regards the issue of standardisation of accreditation as a necessary condition for international higher education (Morshidi and Sarjit 2007). Parliamentary approval for the Malaysia Qualifications Framework (MQF) in early 2007 and the subsequent establishment of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) in November 2007 are small steps in the right direction for Malaysia in terms of raising the overall quality of higher education in line with development at the international level. Malaysia views the issue of quality in higher education as an important aspect in any discussion on international higher education, for there is a risk that international markets may lead to an erosion of quality (Morshidi 2006, Morshidi and Abdul Razak 2007). In this respect, it is important that quality assurance mechanisms are put in place in a collaborative manner. And here we are thinking of its implementation throughout Asia.

The Malaysian government is very concerned with the quality of graduates of professional courses in view of several developments governing professional qualifications globally. For instance, according to the International Engineering Alliance, there are three agreements covering mutual recognition in respect of tertiary-level qualifications in engineering: The Washington Accord, signed in 1989, was the first such development, whereby it recognises substantial equivalence in the accreditation of qualifications in professional engineering, normally of four years duration. The Sydney Accord, which commenced in 2001, recognises substantial equivalence in the accreditation of qualifications in engineering technology, normally of three years duration. The Dublin Accord, commenced in 2002, is an agreement for substantial equivalence in the accreditation of tertiary qualifications in technical engineering, normally of two years duration. With respect to the Washington Accord, Malaysia has been accorded a provisional signatory status and may become member to the accord in the near future.

Looking Forward

At this juncture, it is important to reflect on lessons learned about the drivers of international higher education and regionalism in the European context for Asia. The 'Bologna' process has been adopted as a mechanism for the reorganisation of higher education systems in signatory countries in Europe, specifically around a common bachelors-masters-doctorate model, which over time will promote and facilitate cross-border mobility of students and make Europe an educational hub. In contrast, some countries in Asia are implementing plans to establish their own regional education hubs, with investment and resources spread very thinly among them. According to Ahmad (2003), because of Asia's diversity, with its many 'natural' sub-regional organisations based on geographic, ethnic, religious or historical reasons for cooperation, bringing all countries to a coherent whole requires diplomacy and delicate handling. Arguably, regionalism in the sphere of higher education in Asia will be a big challenge. Characteristic of the region is a wide degree of variation, particularly with respect to level of development and demography. The latter creates significantly contrasting stresses on the higher education systems in each nation (Murphy 2007). In spite of the obstacles,

reform should be underway in Asia particularly with respect to harmonisation of academic degree structures of countries in this region, so as to enable and facilitate credit transfer and ensure quality assurance. John Stuart Mill once wrote that one role that governments should play is protecting citizens from fraud and in this regard, as Miller (2006:7) rightly pointed out, “ensuring rigorous quality-assurance measures are in place may be the critical functions of governments in this new global higher education environment”.

The Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) has outlined several characteristics of the international higher education and the relevance of these for Asia should be contemplated very seriously. These characteristics are: (a) movement not only towards international structures for quality assurance and accreditation, but towards developing regional structures as well; (b) a preference to retain—rather than eliminate—national structures for quality assurance and accreditation even while developing regional and international structures; and (c) continued dialogue and debate on a number of difficult questions, the answers to which will involve the ultimate nature of international higher education space (Eaton 2005: 58).

While estimates of the future demand for international higher education presents tremendous opportunities for Malaysia, these can be harnessed only if initiatives on enhancing quality in higher education, as noted in the Higher Education Plan, are implemented fully. Any obstacles, particularly the bureaucratic ones, should be minimised or even eliminated. In the final analysis, Malaysia needs to move beyond numbers (as source and receiving country) to meaningful outcomes of international higher education. International exposure, intercultural competence and global consciousnesses are some of the important characteristics of graduates of international higher education. These are the missing components in the Higher Education Plan.

References

- Abdul Razak, A. Sarjit, K. and Morshidi, S. (2007). 'Restructuring of University Governance: The Case of Malaysia', in: P. Kell and G. Vogl (Eds.). *Higher Education in the Asia Pacific. Challenges for the Future*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle. pp. 61-83.
- Ahmed, S. (2003). 'The New Asian Realism: Economics and Politics of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue'. URL: http://www.issi.org.pk/journal/2003/no_4/articles/6a.htm. Last accessed 29 December 2007.
- Almanac of Higher Education 2004-5 (2005) 'Institutions enrolling the most foreign students', The Nation, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. URL: <http://chronicle.com/weekly/almanac/2006/nation/0102002.htm>. Last accessed 15 May 2007.
- Atlbach, P. G. (2004). 'Higher Education Crosses Borders'. *Change*, March-April.
- Boehm, A. (2003) *Global Student Mobility 2025: Analysis of Global Competition and Market Share*, IDP Education Pty Ltd., November. URL: http://www.idp.com/aiec/pastpapers/2003Melb/wednesday/research/bohmweds11_p.pdf. Last accessed 15 May 2007.
- Bremer, D. (2006). 'Wanted: Global Workforce'. *International Educator*, May/June, 15, 3, 40-45.
- British Council (2003) *Vision 2020: Forecasting International Student Mobility – A UK Perspective*, pp. 4.
- de Prado Yepes, C. (2007). 'Regionalism of Higher Education Services in Europe and East Asia and Potential for Global Change'. *Asia Europe Journal*, 5, 83-92.
- Eaton, J. S. (2005). 'Quality and an International Higher Education Space'. *International Educator*. Sep/Oct. 14, 5, pp. 57-58.
- Economic Planning Unit and the World Bank (2007). *Malaysia and the Knowledge Economy: Building a World-Class Higher Education System*, World Bank, New York.

- Forest, James, J. F. (2007). 'Regionalism in Higher Education. URL: <http://www.higher-ed.org/resources/JF/regionalism.pdf>. Last accessed 29 December 2007.
- Hawthorne, L. (2007). 'Demography, Migration and International Students., Paper presented at *Asia Pacific Education Market Meeting*, Organised by PECC-APRU, Sheraton on-the-Park Hotel, Sydney, 8 December.
- Healey, N. M. (in press 2007). 'Is Higher Education in *really* 'internationalising '? *Higher Education*.
- International Engineering Alliance. <http://www.washingtonaccord.org/> Last accessed 29 December 2007.
- Kezar, A. J. (2000). 'International Higher Education: ERIC Trends, 1999-2000'. ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education and Institute for Education Policy Studies, Graduate School of Education and Human Development, Washington, DC.
- Lamberte, M. B. (2005). 'An Overview of Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia', in: ADB, *Asian Economic Cooperation and Integration: Progress, Prospects and Challenges*. ADB, Manila.
- Lenn, M. P. (2004). *Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education in East Asia and the Pacific*. World Bank paper Series, Paper no. 2004-6, August.
- Miller, M. A. (2006). 'Providing Higher Education in the Emerging World'. *Change*, Jul/Aug, 38, 4, pp. 6-7.
- Morshidi, S. (2006). 'Malaysia', in: UNESCO/APEID and SEAMEO-RIHED, *Higher Education in South-East Asia*, UNESCO-APEID, and Bangkok. pp.101-136.
- Morshidi, S. (2006). 'Transnational higher education in Malaysia: Balancing benefits and concerns through regulations', in: F. Huang (ed.) *Transnational Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific Region*. RIHE International Publication Series No. 10, Research Institute for Higher Education, Hiroshima University, Hiroshima. pp. 109-150.
- Morshidi, S. and Abdul Razak, A. (2007). 'Cross-border/transnational higher education in Malaysia: Status, opportunities and barriers for trade in higher education services', Fourth Session of the Regional Follow-up Committee for the 1998 World Conference on Higher Education "Internationalization of Higher Education in the

- Asia Pacific: Linkages, Cooperation and Trade”, Macao, PR China, 17-19 July 2007.
- Morshidi, S. and Sarjit, K. (2007). ‘Transnational Higher Education in Malaysia: Trends and Challenges’. Paper presented at ASAIHL Conference on *Leadership for Globalisation in Higher Education: Lessons and Opportunities*, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Australia, 5 to 7 December 2007
- Murphy, C. (2007). ‘Adapting to the Asian Century’. *International Educator*. Jul/Aug, 16, 4, pp. 4.
- Robertson, Susan. L. (2007). ‘Regionalism, ‘Europe/Asia’ and Higher Education’, published by the Centre for Globalisation, Education and Societies, University of Bristol, Bristol BS8 1JA, UK at: URL: <http://www.bris.ac.uk/education/people/academicStaff/edslr/publications/16slr/> Last accessed 29 December 2007.
- Rubin, K. (2007). ‘Where the Students Are in East Asia’. *International Educator*. Jul/Aug, 16, 4, pp. 27-35.
- Sarjit, K. Morshidi, S. and Norzaini, A. (2008). ‘The Scenario of Internationalisation and Globalisation of Higher Education in Malaysia’, in: K. Sarjit, S. Morshidi, S. and A. Norzaini (eds.) (2008). *Globalisation and Internationalisation of Higher Education in Malaysia*. Universiti Sains Malaysia Press, Penang. pp. 3-21.
- Sedgwick, R. (2004). ‘Middle Eastern Students Find Options at Home and Elsewhere’. World Education News & Reviews, November/December. <http://www.wes.org/ewener/04Nov/Feature.htm>. Last accessed 29 December 2007.
- UNESCO (2006). Fulbright New Century Scholars Symposium on Higher Education, October 24, 2006, UNESCO, Paris
- Verbik, L, and Lasanowski, V (2007), ‘International Student Mobility: Patterns and Trends’, *The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education*, UK (September), International Strategic Information Service, Woburn House, London.

GIARI Working Paper Vol. 2008-E-17,

January 31 2009

Published by Waseda University Global COE Program
Global Institute for Asian Regional Integration (GIARI),
Waseda University, Nishiwaseda Bldg. 5F#507 1-21-1
Nishi-waseda, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 169-0051 Japan
E-mail: affairs@waseda-giari.jp
Webpage: <http://www.waseda-giari.jp>

Printed in Japan by International Academic Printing Co.Ltd