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**Higher Education Strategies and International Student
Flows in Asian Countries**

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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.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the structure of international student exchange under the effects of globalization and in the context of the higher education strategies in Asian countries. It offers a specific focus on transnational programs and international student flows, in order to create more significant human networks for Asian regional cooperation and integration.

International student exchange among Asian countries has become more and more common due to higher education reforms, and more students have had opportunities to study abroad. The increase in the number of those students is easily understood as proof of the development of international exchange. However, there seems to be a more complicated structure in the flow of international students. For example, taking a look at the case of Chinese students studying at a branch campus of an Australian university in Malaysia, how should we analyze the relationships of international exchange among China, Malaysia and Australia? Moreover, the numbers of internal students who are studying in foreign higher education institutions in their home country through transnational programs, e.g. credit transfer programs, twinning programs or distance learning programs and so on, are also on the rise.

Considering these situations, one finds that the meaning of international student exchange has changed from a traditional definition, which traditionally focused on mutual understanding between only the two countries concerned. The present international flow of students from Asian countries has become widely popular in various transnational plans as an educational industry or business and a political strategy of each country. As a result, new trends have become apparent. Specifically, we find that some flows have increased among ASEAN countries, China, Korea and Japan, and while student exchange within the Asia region has been more active, the number of Asian students studying in Western countries has still increased.

This increase in human mobility appearing in the Asia region may serve as a unifying force, perhaps even serving as a foundation of an Asian Community. However increased mobility has also led to quality assurance problems and cultural competition among countries. For these reasons, it is necessary to reconsider the role of international student exchange in sustaining social stability and in making better human transnational networks for regional cooperation and integration in Asia.

Introduction

International student exchange has been regarded as an important strategy for developing good relationships with other countries and fostering mutual understanding. There seems to be a traditional way to focus on a bilateral cultural relationship between two countries concerned with sending and receiving international students. International students can serve to bridge a gap between those countries, and they can bring about mutual reliance and develop diplomatic relations.

On the other hand, another function of international student exchange is human resource development, which is also a very important strategy for national development. Nowadays, Asian countries focus on the expansion of higher education, and they have developed various methods of international student exchange to achieve this end. As a result, another new flow of international students has emerged; not of a bilateral nature, but rather, stemming from multilateral relationships. In these situations, political or economic factors are at work, and international student exchange can be interpreted not only in the context of a cultural relationship, but also in the context of political negotiation or the educational industry.

These two functions of international students can be explained differently. Hirano (2003) defined an international exchange as “intellectual exchange” and pointed out the following benefits: i) Transferring knowledge and information across borders, thereby overcoming isolation at home and becoming familiar with what is going on outside; and ii) Enabling wider cooperation and mobilization of intellectuals for more effective solutions to national and international social problems¹. This definition applies to international student exchanges, and the present international student flow can play a role in creating new transnational human networks.

This paper examines the structure of international student exchange under the effects of globalization and in the context of the higher education strategies in Asian countries. The first section discusses the economic and political factors related to international student flows by focusing on student exchange in Malaysia. The second section deals with the structure of international student flows, more generally. The third section focuses on the transition of the international student flows in Asian countries between 1980 and 2002. Finally, it shall elaborate the influences exerted by way of international student flows and issues regarding the transnational human network as one of the original objectives of international student exchanges.

1. International Student Flows and Economic and Political Factors in Asian Countries

1-1. Transnational Programs for International Student Exchange

¹ HIRANO, Kenichiro (2003), “Japan’s Intellectual Exchange with Asia: Are Fifty Years of Effort Bearing Fruit?”, in KAKU, Kagehide and HIRANO, Kenichiro (eds.), *Japan and International Intellectual Exchanges in the 21st Century*, The Japan Times, 2003, pp.159-166.

Nowadays, Asian countries have come to appreciate the relationship between higher education and economic development. Altbach (2004) pointed out that higher education was not emphasized during the initial phases of industrialization and most Asian academic systems remained small with little government investment. However, recently investment in academic institutions and in a research infrastructure is taking place in many Asian countries, and higher education will inevitably become more central as Asian economies become more technology based, more heavily dependent on informatics, and more service based².

Under these circumstances, Asian higher education has developed in various ways. Among them, we find the expansion of transnational programs. This is a very unique trend, spurred on by the phenomenon of globalization. Traditionally, international student exchange has been a personal matter; students who want to study abroad apply to a foreign higher education institution and pursue their chosen specialization in a host country. However, nowadays, new avenues are available for students wishing to obtain degrees from a foreign institution; these can be categorized as “transnational programs”.

“Transnational programs” include several types of programs. Lee (2001)³ classified these programs in the context of Malaysian higher education as follows: twinning programs, credit transfer programs, external degree programs, and distance learning programs. Twinning programs are split degree programs in which students pursue portions of their studies in a local institution, as well as in a foreign institution. Nowadays, “3+0 programs” have become more popular, whereby students can obtain a degree from the foreign institution if they study for 3 years, and this despite the fact they have not gone abroad. Under credit transfer programs, students can accumulate credits and transfer them to one of the foreign-linked higher education institutions to complete their degree program. One characteristic of credit transfer programs is that students have greater flexibility in choosing programs among a group of foreign programs. External degree programs include both foreign and local external programs, giving students the opportunity to study programs which are offered as external degree programs by foreign-linked institutions. Finally, distance learning programs focus on using a variety of media and technology to provide students who have registered directly with the institutions concerned with instruction, without having to move to a specific location.

What these transnational programs have in common is that they are designed through cooperation between local higher institutions and foreign-linked higher education institutions. In old-fashioned international student exchange setups, programs used to be managed on the assumption that students go to other countries or areas by themselves. However, in the case of transnational programs, students do not necessarily

² ALTBACH, Philip G. (2004), “The Past and Future of Asian Universities: Twenty-First Century Challenges” in Altbach, Philip G. & UMAKOSHI, Toru (2004), ‘*Asian Universities: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges*’, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, pp.13-32.

³ LEE, Molly N.N. (2001), “Private Higher Education in Malaysia: Expansion, Diversification and Consolidation”, in LEE, Molly N.N., ‘*Restructuring Higher Education in Malaysia*’, School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, 2004, pp.19-35.

go abroad, and students can learn and get degrees from foreign institutions while staying in their home country. Singh (2005) called international students who participate in the process of internationalization of higher education “transnational students” and pointed out that “they are trying to extend and deepen their capacity and their life opportunities as global/national/local citizens, workers/employers and learners”⁴.

1-2. The Economic Factor in International Student Flows

Transnational programs are closely tied to the economics of international student flows in Asia. Namely, the cost of transnational programs is comparatively less than common student exchanges. There are many examples that illustrate this fact. It is the case, for example, if we consider Monash University Malaysia, one of the leading universities in Australia which developed off-shore programs, and which opened its branch campus in Malaysia in 1996, just after the “Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996 of Malaysia” was enacted. Taking a comparative look at studying at Monash University in Australia and at the Malaysia branch campus, in the case of a 3-year bachelor of computer science, the total cost is only about half of the cost of studying in Australia⁵. This shows that students can study the Monash curriculum for less than half the cost in Malaysia.

Taking this comparison into consideration, it is natural for international students to prefer Monash University in Malaysia as their destination for higher education. As one Monash international student from Sri Lanka put it, “My decision to join Monash was largely influenced by my father, who used to travel to Malaysia on business trips. He felt that enrolling at the Malaysia campus would allow me to obtain an internationally recognized degree at a fraction of the cost, without having to go to Australia”⁶. Students can study for less and in English in Malaysia.

On the other hand, accepting international students is also beneficial to the host country. First, international students bring foreign currency with them. Secondly, international students are a potential source of manpower for the host country. After they graduate from their schools, if there is a favorable possibility to stay in the host country for work, the student may join the work force of the host country. This is a very important consideration for countries where the work force is strained.

1-3 The Political Factor in International Student Flows

1-3-1. Each Country’s Strategy and International Competence

⁴ SINGH, Michael (2005), “Enabling Transnational Learning Communities: Policies, Pedagogies and Politics of Educational Power” in NINNES, Peter & HEELSTEN, Meeri ‘*Internationalizing Higher Education: Critical Explorations of Pedagogy and Policy*’, Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong, Springer, pp.9-35.

⁵ ‘*Education Guide Malaysia* (2003), (8th Edition’, Challenger Concept (M) Sdn.Bhd., p.300. The costs was based of data from ‘*Study in Malaysia Handbook (3rd edition.)*’.

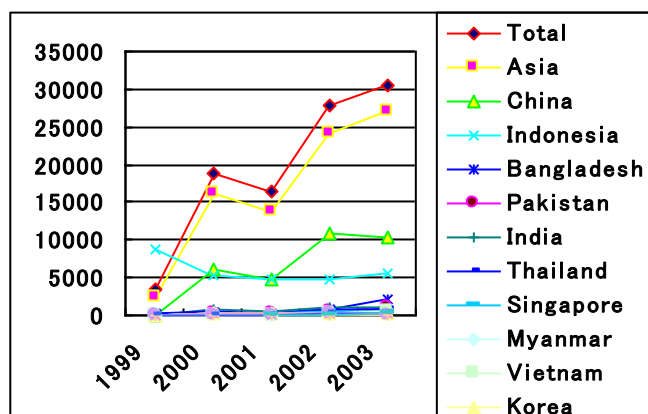
⁶ Students’ voices “What Local & Overseas Students’ Say” of Monash University Malaysia in <http://www.studymalaysia.com/>, June 16, 2004

Besides Monash University in Malaysia, other private colleges in Malaysia attract international students with their various transnational programs. There are many colleges that have tied up transnational programs with higher education institutions of some western countries, i.e., USA, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and so on, and such programs are no longer rare. The Ministry of Private Higher Education of Malaysia has appealed to these colleges abroad. Their educational offerings are now distinct, insofar as they boast low tuition, instruction in an English environment and access to degrees with western countries through transnational programs. Also, it is the Malaysian Ministry who assures the quality of these programs.

Malaysia has been actively involved in promoting its education abroad, in particular since 1998. In line with materializing the government’s goal of making Malaysia a “Center of Educational Excellence”, the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia has formulated various promotional plans and strategies. The Ministry has promoted Malaysian education with higher education institutions abroad by establishing Malaysian education promotion offices outside of Malaysia. Such outreach has been carried out not only in South East Asian countries, but also in Africa, the Middle East, East Asia and so on.⁷ Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3 show us that the numbers of international students from Asia, the Middle East and Africa have increased since the end of the 1990s. This indicates that economic and political strategies are reflected in international student flows.

Malaysia is an Islamic country and it can develop a relationship with an Islamic bloc, not only in Asia but also outside Asia. Through Islam, Malaysia can create unique bridges and partnerships with other Islamic countries, an asset other countries in Asia are not able to exploit. This is already evidenced in Malaysia’s tourism industry, where it has been eager to attract foreign tourists from the Islam bloc. Actually, the

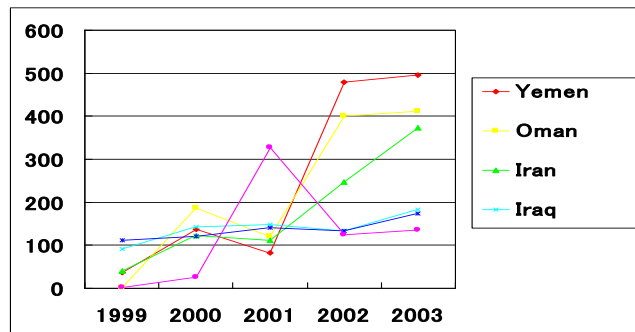
Fig.1 International Students from Asian Countries in Malaysia



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, “International flows of mobile students at the tertiary level 1999-2003” compiled by Miki SUGIMURA

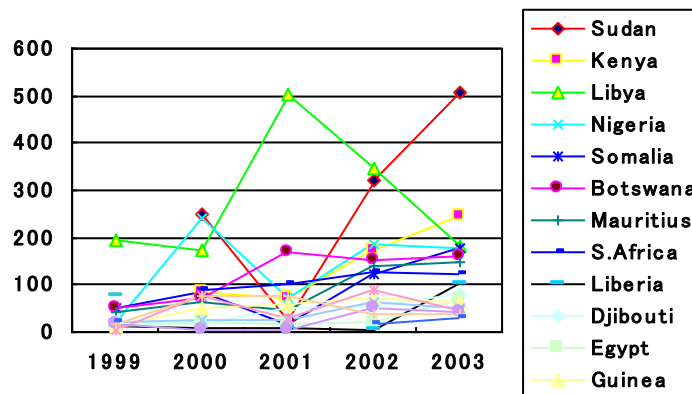
Fig.2 International Students from Middle East Countries in Malaysia

⁷ ‘Education Guide Malaysia(2003) (8th Edition)’, op.cit., p.59.



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics compiled by Miki SUGIMURA, *ibid.*

Fig.3 International Students from African Countries in Malaysia



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics compiled by Miki SUGIMURA, *ibid.*

international students from abroad to Malaysia have been increasing, and it is said that the Malaysian government aims to accept 100,000 international students by 2010, a drastic increase compared with 12,000 in 2001⁸.

The trend of accepting large numbers of international students will become increasingly difficult to maintain. As other Asian countries become internationally competitive, such as Singapore, Thailand and China, they too become increasingly enthusiastic to accept international students. As for Singapore, it has a similar strategy to Malaysia, also aiming to become an “Educational Hub” among Asian countries. Education is now one of its important industries in addition to tourism. Singapore has been trying to attract international students by marketing similar strengths, English instruction, along with peace and order. Characteristic of Singapore’s educational strategy is that it is focusing not only on higher education, but also on primary and secondary education. Nowadays, about 66,000 international students are studying in Singapore from South Korea, China, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and so on.

⁸ TAN, Irene(2006), “International Students’ Policy and Private Higher Education in Malaysia” in SUGIMURA, Miki ed(2006)., *Higher Education Strategies of Asian Countries in the International Education Market*, (Report of Grant-in Aid for Exploratory Research 2004-2006 of MEXT, Japan), pp.85-94.

This increase in numbers implies an increase in international human resources for Singapore's future development. Singapore aims to attract 150,000 international students by 2012⁹.

1-3-2. International Students Influenced by Diplomatic Relationships

As mentioned above, international student flows are impacted by economic factors and political strategies underpinning education policies in each country. However, these flows are also influenced and sometimes restricted by diplomatic relationships. The case of Malaysian Chinese students studying abroad serves as a case in point. In Malaysia, the affirmative action plan for Malays (Bumiputera Policy) has been in effect since the 1970's. Therefore, people of Chinese descent have sent their children to study abroad at their own expense. Typically, they are sent to one of several destinations: United States, Canada, U.K., Australia and so on. It is particularly uncommon for Malaysian Chinese students to go to Taiwan. Until the mid-1990s, apart from western countries, many students traveled from Malaysia to Taiwan to pursue their studies. At that time, there was no diplomatic relationship between Malaysia and China, and student exchange between China and Malaysia was very difficult. Under these circumstances, Taiwan, which had a good relationship with Malaysia in the private sector, was an easily accessible destination in terms of language and culture for Chinese Malaysian students. In addition, Taiwan welcomed Malaysian students in order to maintain a good relationship with the Malaysian Chinese community.

Malaysia and China, however, developed a close relationship in the 1990s, with new economic ties. As a result, Malaysian students could now choose to pursue their studies in China. Moreover, being the homeland of the first generation of Malaysian immigrants, it was highly accessible to Malaysian Chinese in terms of language and culture. According to the researchers of the United Chinese Schools Teachers' Association of Malaysia (UCSCAM) and the United Chinese Schools Committees' Association of Malaysia (UCSTAM), the number of Chinese Malaysian students who went to Taiwan increased since the middle of the 1950s and in particular, in the 1980s, with more than 600 Chinese students graduating from Taiwan's higher education institutions every year. In the 1990s the number of graduates remained the same. On the other hand, from the end of the 1990s, the number of students going to China gradually increased. This indicates that student exchange between China and Malaysia, which had never been seen before, developed from a bilateral diplomatic relationship between the two countries¹⁰.

2. Structure of International Student Flows in Asian Countries

2-1. From the Traditional Cultural Context to Economic and Political Strategies

⁹ 'Asahi-Shin bun (Asahi Newspaper)', June 28, 2005

¹⁰United Chinese Schools Teachers' Association of Malaysia(UCSTAM), "*Statistic of Number of Malaysian Chinese Students' Graduate from Higher Institutions of Taiwan 1954-2003*", and United Chinese Schools Committees' Association of Malaysia (UCSCAM), "*Statistic of Number of Malaysian Chinese Students' being sent to China 1996-2005*"

Taking a look at the factors shaping international student flows in the previous section, it should be pointed out that international student exchange cannot be explained only in the traditional context of mutual understanding, instead it should be regarded as a political and economic strategy. These strategies are a means of human resource development and national development in each country. Transnational programs are a very effective way for enlarging higher education at a lower cost. They are also counter measures to brain drain problems, from which each country has suffered. In the case of “3+0” programs, students can study foreign curricula and get degrees without going abroad; this serves quite a different function compared with traditional student exchange.

This trend in international student exchange is closely related with a way of thinking which regards education as a kind of industry or business, and efficiency is taken very seriously. Each country’s government has tried to use transnational programs to enlarge higher education given their respective budgetary limits. In addition, international students have demonstrated an affinity toward this more efficient way of obtaining degrees.

At the same time, transnational programs have an impact on the standardization of degrees, because international students from various countries can study the same program at the same time. In this sense, transnational programs are attractive to the officials and the general public. For example, from the 1990s China has developed transnational programs while sending more Chinese students abroad. In the case of China, there is a dependence on international student flows to its private education sector. Moreover, the number of Chinese students bearing the cost of their education has been on the rise¹¹. This is closely related with a more active flow of Chinese students within the international student flow in Asia.

2-2. From Bilateral Exchange to Multilateral Exchange

Transnational programs also influence the method of exchange, that is, multilateral international student exchange. International student exchanges were traditionally an educational matter between two countries sending and accepting students. However, the present transnational programs are sometimes developed between two or more countries. As mentioned earlier, in the case of Monash University Malaysia, not only Malaysian students but also other international students have been studying there in pursuit of degrees. At least three countries are concerned here, namely Australia, Malaysia and countries which send international students to the university, and this causes a new multilateral relationship between those countries through international student mobility.

The students also seem to be thinking differently about studying at foreign institutions. Traditionally, studying at a foreign institution meant going abroad and entering an institution in a host country as foreign visitors, and studying not only one’s academic specialty, but the country’s history, culture, language, as well as developing

¹¹ SUGIMURA, Miki(2003), "The International Students Policy and National Development Strategy in China" in '*Journal of Asian Cultures*' (*Toyo-Bunka Kenkyu*), Vol.5, Research Institute for Oriental Cultures, Gakushuin University, pp.67-90. (in Japanese).

friendships. On the other hand, with transnational programs, international students do not necessarily think of their studies in the traditional way. For example, among students trying to enter Monash University Malaysia, some students might suggest that they are going to Monash, not a Malaysian university, because they hope to get a degree from Monash Australia. The same is applied to other split degree programs. Students choose foreign-linked institutions which can grant them degrees, and many of them are not concerned about intercultural exchange with the host country. In “3+0” programs, students do not have to go abroad, so they have no way to learn about foreign-linked countries thorough the programs.

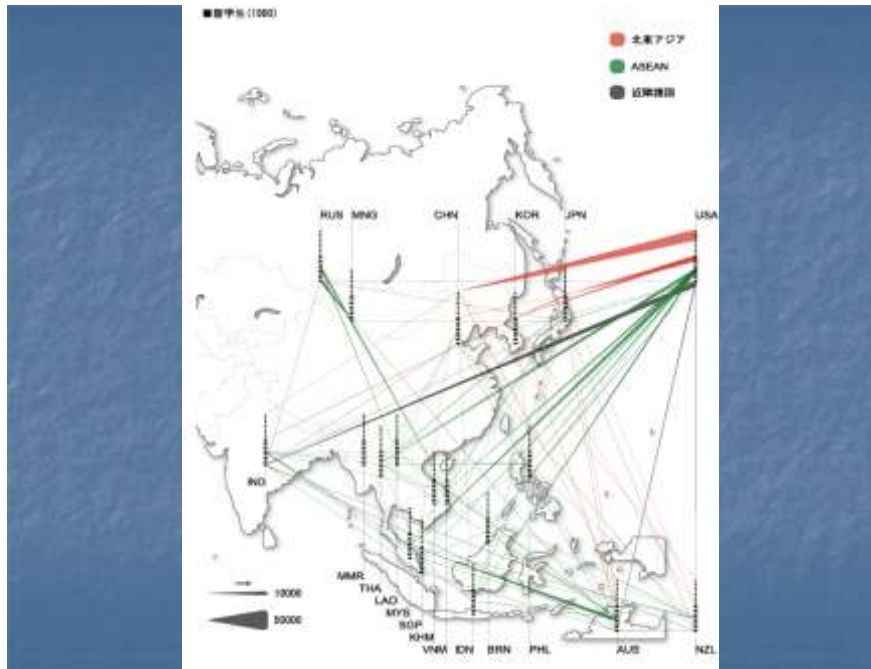
3. Transition of International Student Flow in Asian Countries

With the introduction of transnational programs as economic and political strategies, changes are witnessed in international student flows amongst Asian countries, as Figure 4 and Figure 5 indicate.

The first thing we notice is that the number of international students going from Asia to Western countries -- for example the number of Asian students going to the United States and Australia -- has been on the rise. These countries have attracted international students from all over the world and remain very popular among Asian students. Additionally, they act as counterparts in transnational programs with Asian countries, resulting in greater opportunities for Asian students to obtain foreign degrees.

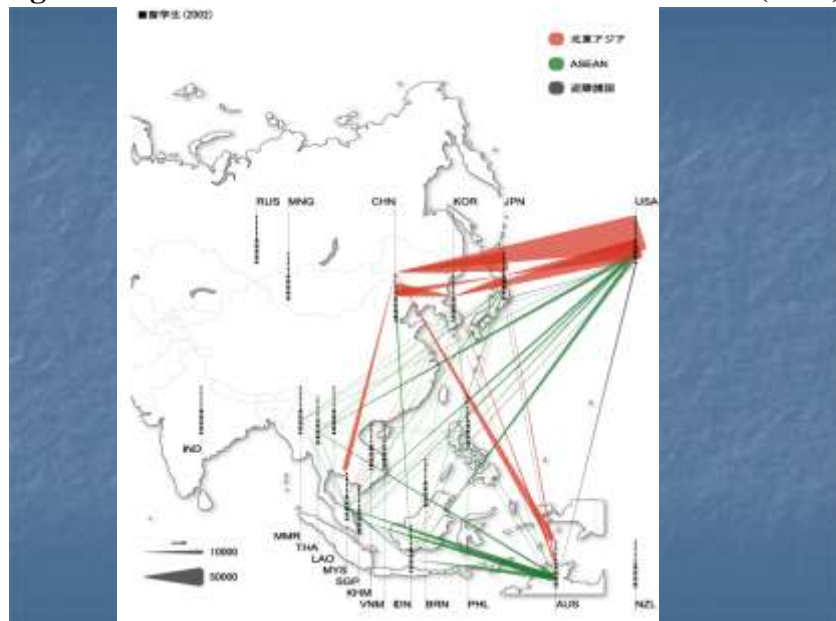
Secondly, it can be said that new flows exist from China to Japan, Japan to China, Korea to Japan, Korea to China, and China to Malaysia. In particular the flow of students from China to Australia has increased tremendously, which indicates that student flows from East Asian countries (China, Korea and Japan) are more considerable than before.

Fig.4 International student flows from Asian Countries (1980)



Source: MORIKAWA Yuji (2006)“Map of International Students" with UNESCO Data, in MORI Kazuko and Yuji Morikawa eds. *Asian Network Analysis, (Designing an East Asian Community No.4)* Iwanami, pp.228-229.

Fig.5 International student flows from Asian Countries (2002)



Source: MORIKAWA Yuji (2006), *ibid.*

Third, some ASEAN countries, such as Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, have become hubs or bases of international exchange. Nowadays, international students move not only to Western countries, but increasingly within the Asia region, as well.

Focusing on East Asian countries tertiary education outflows (Figure 6), we note that China, Korea and Japan have sent their students to Western countries, including Australia, and in greatest numbers to the United States. In 2004, the number of international students from China to the United States amounted to 87,493, while from Korea to the United States they numbered 52,484, and from Japan to the United States, 40,835. These figures represent 33.0% (China), 59.2%(Korea) and 73.9%(Japan)

o f t o t a l

Fig.6 Destination of International students from East Asian Countries

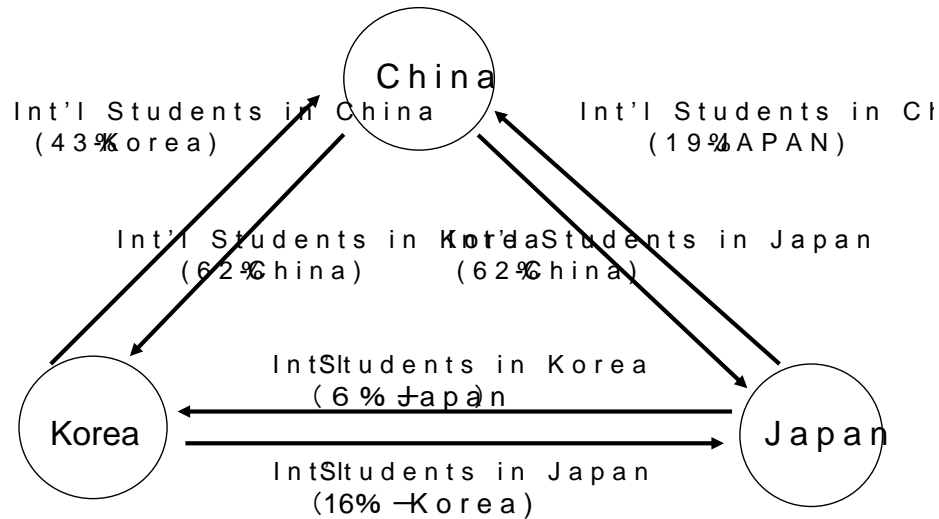


Source: Compiled by Miki SUGIMURA with statistics of Atlas of Student Flow, Institute of International Education (Statistics for the year 2004).

students abroad at the tertiary level for each country. China and Korea have sent many students to Japan, as well. International students from China to Japan total 76,130 (28.7% of total Chinese students abroad) and from Korea to Japan they total 23,280 (26.3% of total Korean students). As Figure 7 indicates, Chinese students represent 62% of international students in Japan and Korean students represent 16% of the international student population. Between China and Korea, 43% of international students in China are Korean students and 62% of international students in Korea are Chinese students. This indicates that Asian students choose not only Western countries for higher education, but also Asian countries, and as a result new human flows appear.

Similar trends can be found between China and ASEAN countries. ASEAN countries also have welcomed international students from Asian countries, and their numbers are on the rise, as well.

Fig.7
International Student Flow of East Asia



Source: Compiled by Miki SUGIMURA with statistics of Atlas of Student Flow, Institute of International Education (Statistics for the year 2004).

4. Issues caused by Transitions in International Student Flows

As mentioned in the previous section, current international student exchange through transnational programs is both a politically and economically efficient strategy, developed through multilateral relationships. This structure will grow in prominence under the pressures of globalization, which seeks efficiency and standardization. However, it should be noted that there are some issues that remain to be addressed with regard to international student exchanges. The first is the problem of quality assurance in transnational programs. While transnational programs can be very helpful in political and economic strategies, some of them are managed as a form of for profit educational business.

This issue includes the problem of certification. The World Trade Organization (WTO) recognized the importance of an information network for transnational higher education programs in 2002. UNESCO also confirmed the necessity of establishing a world-wide network of organizations for quality assurance in higher education in 2003. As Altbach (2004) noted, massification and expansion of higher education in Asian countries are inevitable and irresistible, and Asian countries are currently coping with the implications of continuing expansion. However, this pressure makes it difficult to focus on improving quality, upgrading research, enhancing the working conditions and

so on¹². For this reason, it is necessary to put forth the necessary effort to assure standards of transnational higher education programs. For example, the Malaysian government established the National Accreditation Board (Lembaga Akreditasi Nasional, LAN) in 1997 to monitor and control the standards and quality of all the educational programs including transnational programs by private higher education institutions in Malaysia¹³. In 2007, the Malaysian Qualification Agency was set up in order to support the implementation of the Malaysian Qualifications Frameworks and to establish a unified quality assurance system¹⁴. In China, the Department of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education initiated a project entitled “Enhancing Higher Education Quality” in 2003, to grapple with problems of quality in Chinese higher education. In the same year, the Chinese government implemented another policy on cooperation and linkages between Chinese universities and foreign institutions. These two initiatives are indicative of the strategies for promotion of transnational programs by Chinese universities with foreign institutions¹⁵. As these monitoring sectors insist, international student exchanges should be carried out with a guarantee of quality in higher education offerings.

The second issue that needs to be addressed in light of present international student exchange trends, is that sometimes these exchanges affect the internal administration of the countries involved. International student exchanges inevitably involve cultural contact and human flows, which sometimes lead to other social problems. The recent restoration of English as a medium of instruction in Malaysia, for example, is the source of some friction within the country. The Malaysian government has attached significant importance to the national education policy as a means of national integration, and has adopted the Malay language, the national language of Malaysia, as the main medium of instruction in national schools. There are three types of national primary schools in Malaysia: National Primary Schools (Malays), and National-type Primary Schools (Chinese and Tamil). Students can choose the school they wish to attend at the primary level, however, from the lower secondary level, there is only one option available to students: Secondary School, taught in Malay. Even at the higher education level, the Malay language has been the main medium of instruction since 1983. However, with the increase in the number of private institutions in the 1990s, using English as a language of instruction was reevaluated. English is an invaluable language amongst those private institutions that want to develop

¹² ALTBACH, Philip G. (2004), “The Past and Future of Asian Universities: Twenty-First Century Challenges” in ALTBACH, Philip G. & UMAKOSHI, Toru (2004) *Asian Universities: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges*, op.cit., p.23.

¹³ LEE, Molly N.N.(2004), “Malaysian Universities: Toward Equality, Accessibility, and Quality” in Philip G.Altbach & Toru Uamkoshi(2004) *Asian Universities: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges*, op.cit., pp.221-246.

¹⁴ Sarjit Kaur, Morshidi Sirat and Norzaini Azman(2008), "The Scenario of Globalisation and Interantionalisation of Higher Education in Malaysia" in Sarjit Kaur, Morshidi Sirat and Norzaini Azman eds., *Globalisation and Internationalisation of Higher Education in Malaysia*, Pnenerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, pp.11-12.

¹⁵ MIN, Weifang (2004), “Chinese Higher Education: The Legacy of the Past and the Context of the Future” in ALTBACH, Philip G. & UMAKOSHI, Toru(2004) *Asian Universities: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges*, op.cit., pp.53-83.

transnational programs with foreign-linked institutions. Nowadays, though the Malay language is still the only national language designated in the Constitution of Malaysia, and the main medium of instruction in higher education institutions, English is also regarded as an important medium, and each institution can adopt English instruction with the permission of the government. Malaysia also attaches a certain importance to the development of information and technology in education, which in turn affects this restoration of English as a medium of instruction. In national primary schools, the instruction of mathematics and science has changed from Malay, Chinese or Tamil to English as of 2003.

Another effect of increased student flows is the number of Chinese students from mainland China studying in Malaysia; it was said that about one-third of the international students in Malaysia were Chinese in 2003¹⁶. Nowadays, it appears as though Chinese student flows have decreased. On the other hand, there is a vibrant Chinese Malaysian community in Malaysia. However, there seems to be a cultural difference between Chinese Malaysian students and Chinese students from China, although they share Chinese ancestry. There is also the possibility of new relationships emerging between new ethnic groups in Malaysia.

Finally, we should note that there is a relationship between transnational higher education and matters of national concern, that is worthy of attention. Transnational education is indeed organized in various ways and international student mobility is developed across and beyond national borders. However, there are political and economic strategies that underpin those movements. In other words, transnational higher education is different from traditional nation-based higher education; however it is still strongly influenced by each country's interest in national development. In connection with this point, Morshidi (2008) pointed out that "the present [*sic*] Malaysia's higher education policy is clearly an attempt to be current and fashionable to face the new challenges in higher education but operationalising these through the familiar state-centric framework".¹⁷

Conclusion

This paper focuses on international student flows in the context of Asian countries' higher education strategies. The present flow of international students is shaped by economic considerations, whereby international students prefer more economical and efficient programs. The host government also tries to accept them as sources of future manpower for economic development. Political considerations are equally important in shaping international student flows. This includes the host countries' strategies to raise their presence in the international society.

These economic and political factors are included in transnational programs offered to international students. Nowadays, it seems that transnational programs serve

¹⁶ As the Fig.1 shows, Malaysia's total number of international students in 2003 was 30,407, of which 10,447 were Chinese.

¹⁷ MORSHIDI Sirat, "Policy for Higher Education in a Changing World: Is Malaysia's Higher Education Policy Maturing or Just Fashionable?", presented at Forum on *Higher Education in a Globalising Worlds: Developing and Sustaining an Excellent System*, Merdeka Palace Hotel and Suites, Kuching, 11 January 2008.

not only traditional goals, such as mutual understanding, but also as economic and political strategies. The character of transnational programs has developed from bilateral exchanges, to new multilateral relationships, involving at least three countries.

What is clear is that transnational programs for international student exchange are products of globalization, which seek efficiency and standardization beyond national boundaries. As a result, new trends of students exchange are evidenced in Asia. In particular, some flows between ASEAN countries and China, Korea and Japan have emerged and the student exchange flows within the Asia region have become more significant, while the number of Asian students studying in Western countries has also increased.

However, while the introduction of transnational programs is an efficient means to expand higher education, quality assurance is a very crucial issue that must continue to be addressed. Also, the impact of foreign programs on the administration of education within a country is the source of some concern. When international student exchanges cause cultural conflicts and competition, how should the transnational programs be evaluated? In other words, these issues might lead one to conclude that transnational programs for international student exchange should be reconsidered as a matter of localization, the opposite of globalization, because problems of quality assurance and cultural conflicts should be examined according to each country's situation.

It should be noted that international students are "human beings" with dreams and hopes and not "goods" for international trade. In the same vein, issues of quality assurance and cultural conflict cannot be ignored. If they are not taken into consideration, transnational programs cannot be functional and will not be able to contribute to a better transnational human network for regional cooperation and integration in Asia.

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