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Asian Higher Education and the Challenges of Globalization

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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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In a land of tremendous size and diversity like Asia, the frameworks and practical experiences of higher education are understandably vast and varied. However, in all Asian countries, large and small, the role of higher education in practically all aspects of their development is uniformly critical.

In Asian countries like Japan and Thailand, modern higher education (i.e., based on the Western models) assumed a crucial role in their modernization drives, beginning in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the post World War II period nearly all countries in the region experienced an explosion of higher education that has since become an important factor not only in national development efforts, but also in the life of individuals.

At the present time, the development of higher education in Asia, rooted in the different historical backgrounds of the countries in the region, is changing rapidly in the context of their changing social and economic problems and needs. Amidst these changes, however, Asian higher education is again facing a common challenge: globalization.

What is the nature of this challenge? How well are the vast and varied experiences of Asian higher education coping with this challenge? What are the likely consequences for the future development of higher education in this region? I cannot thoroughly address all these highly complex issues. I will only highlight some of their implications.

Globalization: An Unavoidable Challenge?

As a concept, as well as practical experience, globalization has become firmly rooted as a part of our daily life. With the tumbling down of barriers of all sorts – tariffs, strict border controls, and other types of cross-border regulations – cross-border phenomena ranging from the flows of information to the explosion of international travel have become commonplace. In varying contexts and for diverse purposes, nearly all normal activities – from eating to schooling – have become “internationalized”, or “globalized”.

This process can, of course, be expected to be one of two-way exchange that results in mutual influence and benefits, whether the actors involved are nation-states, government agencies, private companies, or even individuals. In practice, however, things seem not to be proceeding this way, and it is mainly for this reason that we should reconsider globalization and its

consequences. In higher education, which is already undergoing transformations (related as well as unrelated to globalization), this has become urgently important.

Despite the diversified picture of higher education in Asia, this important social institution (especially in Southeast Asia in the post-World War II period) is tied very closely to political and economic developments of individual countries in the region. In the more developed countries, the focus of higher education is increasingly on its diversification, commercialization, and internationalization. In the less developed countries, higher education is serving more diversified needs ranging from access to higher education for a larger segment of the populace, to the training of a skilled work force for national development.

Almost everywhere, however, higher education has in a way become a social need in and of itself: we may even say that it has become a “lifestyle” for a growing number of people. As a result, the “massification” of higher education is increasing. Moreover, higher education institutions now have to face and address common issues and needs, including structural reforms, access and diversification, governance and management (especially of the activities resulting from commercialization and internationalization of higher education), accreditation and quality assurance. Within and/or among such issue areas are the more urgent problems of funding, training of faculties, curricular reforms, maintaining standards, and changing social expectations.

Some of these problems and issues are closely related to, or have resulted from, growing globalizing trends. However, for the sake of conceptual clarity, the issue of changing higher education and globalization will be treated separately. In this way we can more clearly assess the impacts of globalization on higher education on the one hand, and the implications of transformations in higher education, on the other.

It is now generally accepted that the impact of globalization, positive or negative, is unavoidable. The issue is how to cope with, and benefit from, this growing trend. For this purpose, we need to arrive at a clearer understanding of the phenomenon itself. We can define globalization, for our purposes here, in the following way:

Globalization is the flow of technology, economic activities, people, values, and ideas across borders. Globalization affects each country in a different way owing to its individual history traditions, culture, and priorities. Globalization increases and reflects greater interdependence and interconnectedness in the world.

In this way, each country has a different perspective on globalization and is coping with this phenomenon in its own way. It is difficult to track the way each Asian country is responding to the challenge of globalization. Rather, this paper will focus on the general directions and forms of what we may come to understand as “globalization of higher education”. Then, I will venture to propose what we Asians should do together to respond to this challenge.

Impacts of Globalization on Higher Education

Higher education may be said to have been significantly responsible for the development of globalization. Higher education has made crucial contributions to advances in scientific knowledge that led to technological developments in critical areas such as transportation and communications. As we all know, these areas represent what has been referred to as the “core accelerants” of globalization.¹

However, higher education itself has been profoundly influenced by the scientific and technological advancements for which it was principally responsible. For instance, the increasing “mobility” in higher education (in the form of personnel and information exchanges and new course delivery systems, among numerous others) is a direct result of technological advances in our time. Moreover, we have witnessed various types of “academic globalization”. As Philip Altbach has pointed out,

[We are now]...experiencing a multinational trend – with foreign academic institutions working with local institutions, or setting up shop on their own, offering academic programmes and degrees “off the shelf” or based on models from Europe, the United States, or Australia. Distance education, using the Internet, is beginning to be used to deliver degrees. In a way, it is a repetition of colonial era imports of institutions and ways of thinking, but this time the foreigners are welcomed with open arms.²

Internationalism in higher education, as Altbach has also emphasized, is not a new thing. Modern universities all over the world are mostly modeled upon the Western prototypes, dating back to the medieval period. In Asia, these western models were either voluntarily adopted, like

¹ Jeon-Kyu Lee, “Asiatic Values in East Asian Higher Education: From a Standpoint of Globalization”, *Globalization* (2005) <http://globalization.icaap.org/content/v5.1.html>

² Philip Altbach, “The Perils of Internationalizing Higher Education: An Asian Perspective”, *International Higher Education*, Spring 1999 http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/News15/text2.html

in Japan, or imposed by western powers on the lands and peoples under their colonial rule. Moreover, English, like Latin in the past, has become the common language of higher education. Now, well over a million students are studying outside their home countries – the majority of them are from Asia and are studying in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

We in Asia can hardly deny the positive benefits of a foreign education. In an age that places a high value on multiculturalism, “academic globalization” actually implies “intercultural education”. We can define this new educational activity in terms of a learning situation characterized by *intercultural interaction*, which is used actively as a pedagogic resource.

What types of higher educational products are being sold? Are Asians receiving real value for their money? Foreign education has indeed become a big business promoted by sophisticated marketing. The more higher education becomes a “lifestyle” (rather than serving the real needs of a country), the more the business tends to thrive. Despite the devastating impacts of the economic crisis in the late 1990s, the flows of Asian students, especially from China, Japan, South Korea, India, and Southeast Asia, to the West have been increasing. There is a real danger of the West becoming a “degree mill” for these students.

Having said this, I must hasten to add that I am not in any way opposed to growing academic globalization. On the contrary, I am in favor of both its further expansion and more intensive cultivation. At the same time it is important that we know who really gets what from this globalizing development. This should be a concern especially for Asians, as they constitute the largest flow of foreign students to the West.

How should we respond to the globalization of higher education? What can we do, in other words, in order not to be only at the receiving end of this rising global trend? My idea is very simple: If academic globalization is unavoidable, we must really “internationalize” Asian higher education, and in doing so, we Asians must not lose sight of our own values and heritage inherent in this domain of life.

Internationalization as a Response to Globalization

In Thai, we have a saying: If a thorn has stuck into your body, you must get another one to get it out. Internationalization of higher education, in other words, is one way of responding to

globalization. Internationalization is actually part and parcel, or an agent, of globalization. However, as a process, it may be conceived as a response to globalization itself.

I conceive of internationalization here, as a process of integrating international or intercultural dimensions into the teaching, research and service functions of the higher educational institution. As such, it incorporates both international/global and local elements. Not to be confused with globalization itself, it must be understood rather as a response to this rising global trend.

As I have indicated, internationalization is hardly new. Since ancient times, people have interacted with other cultures, out of curiosity, necessity or by sheer coincidence. Explorers such as James Cook, Vasco da Gama, Christopher Columbus, among others, trotted the globe in their search for knowledge. Famous Swedish scientists Carl von Linn and Emanuel Swedenborg worked in different parts of the world. Academics and students went abroad to attend foreign universities in those days, as well. Thus, the interest in the world, other peoples, cultures, languages and ideas as part of the quest for knowledge or simply out of curiosity, has always been a motive to pursue academic training abroad.

Internationalization today is different from that of the past in one important respect: international activities have become truly “globalized”. People, capital, ideas, media images and other cultural signs travel around the world more rapidly and efficiently than ever before. International experiences are increasingly common. The Internet, in particular, connects people of different backgrounds across huge distances, linking people who otherwise would be strangers to one another. “Virtual reality” has become “real” in the sense that it is a significant factor in the construction of the identity of many people.

At this point, it might seem that globalization and internationalization are hardly distinguishable. However, as we have seen, the important aspect of internationalization is that it incorporates both local and international/global elements. Expanding this idea further, I would like to suggest that internationalization implies the pooling of strengths and efforts from local and international sources for common purposes.

Hence, internationalization is not an exclusive concern of higher educational institutions. For a variety of reasons, business firms, political parties, non-governmental organizations, civil

society associations, and many other bodies and groups also define their activities in international terms and come into alliances with their foreign counterparts.

From this perspective, there is a very strong rationale for the internationalization of higher education. International cooperation provides students and staff from the “poor world” with access to new sources of knowledge and competence. Moreover, the multicultural interaction creates a unique opportunity for cross-cultural understanding that would lead, in turn, to the tolerance and respect of differences. The global and national communities would work in solidarity and against ethnocentrism, racism and academic self-righteousness.

In so far as it widens and facilitates access to higher education among nations, we can say that the internationalization of higher education can contribute to a more democratic, fair and equal world. It increases the awareness of varying life conditions, social injustices and racial segregation which people endure. Over time this may initiate a redistribution of resources and welfare. UNESCO indeed stresses the important role of higher education to accomplish this.

With internationalization, higher education has become a global commodity. Of course, the wealthy nations, through international exchange programmes, stand to benefit by attracting researchers, teaching staff and fee-paying students from the “poor world” – a situation that might eventually lead to what has been known as “brain drain”. Internationalization, in other words, is guided by the economic and political interests, standards, and value systems of the “rich world”.

Hence, internationalization is seen as a predominantly one-way flow – “they” in the poor world can learn from “us”, but we in the rich world have little to learn from them. In its most extreme guise, internationalization serves as an instrument to educate the “uncivilized people” or simply a strategy to maximize profits and ensure economic growth.

I do not espouse such an extreme view. I believe, instead, that cosmopolitan cities and universities could benefit from one another - either by cooperation or competition - much more than they are doing now. It is therefore timely to reexamine and update the conceptual frameworks underpinning the notion of internationalization in light of today’s changes and challenges.

Internationalization: ASEAN Perspective and Experiences

In Southeast Asia, a dialogue on the internationalization of higher education was initiated in the early 1990s. This was then followed by the efforts of various parties sharing common interests in activities. These included the government, universities and other educational institutions. Globalization in multidimensional aspects of life also triggered every nation to make adjustments and to be more adaptive to global standards. Higher educational institutions also face this challenge in terms of their capability to produce graduates that meet global standards of qualifications.

Many of the universities in this region have already engaged in international activities ranging from student and staff exchanges to joint research and development projects. The challenge for the future is to work out more collaborative arrangements between international partners on a more equal basis.

A lot could be achieved through such arrangements. For instance, with mutual quality assurance and standard recognition, the quality of graduates could be guaranteed. The learning process embedded in the curricular structures, delivery methods, academic atmosphere, and academic programmes should therefore serve to guarantee the quality of graduates. These are some of the initial steps that should be taken with a view to promoting internationalization.

Forums and/or events are already available, where universities can meet and open the discussion on potential collaboration that leads to internationalization. These include university organizations at the regional and sub-regional levels such as the ASEAN University Network (AUN), the European University Association, and the Association of African Universities, as well as international organizations such as the International Association of Universities, the International Association of University Presidents, among others.

Through participation in such forums and organizations, the member institutions can obtain benefits in the form of information on scientific trends and developments, regulations in other countries and university best practices and failures, and so on. One should admit that these organizations have been more actively promoting internationalization of higher education than national governments. An organization like the AUN has also been facilitating its members in various seminars, workshops, and technical forums for international collaboration.

Established under the umbrella of ASEAN and the mandate of Ministers responsible for higher education in ASEAN countries, the AUN, in particular, is performing a vital role in

supporting member countries in dealing with these challenges. It is responsible for the promotion of human resource development in the field of higher education within ASEAN and with its dialogue partners, namely Japan, Korea, China, India, Russia and the EU.

The idea of forming a university network within ASEAN was conceived at the fourth ASEAN Summit held in Singapore in January 1992. The ASEAN leaders mandated the association strengthen its solidarity and hasten the development of a regional identity by considering ways to further enhance existing networks of leading universities and institutions of higher learning in the region. With this idea the AUN formally came into being in November 1995, with the signing of its Charter by the Ministers responsible for higher education from ASEAN countries, the signing of the Agreement on the Establishment of AUN by the presidents/rectors/vice-chancellors of participating universities, and the formation of the AUN Board of Trustees.

The main objective of the AUN is to strengthen the existing collaborative network of leading universities in ASEAN by promoting cooperation and solidarity among ASEAN scholars and academics, developing academic and professional human resources, and encouraging information dissemination among the ASEAN academic community. As a significant ASEAN achievement, the ASEAN University Network has contributed greatly to the promotion of a regional identity through human resource development (HRD). The AUN has since become one of the most active networks in promoting HRD in ASEAN.

It is presently composed of 21 leading member universities from ASEAN countries with its Secretariat Office located at Chulalongkorn University. The AUN Secretariat operates under the Commission on Higher Education, Ministry of Education of Thailand, and collaborates with the ASEAN Secretariat for the implementation of AUN priority activities. The main tasks of the AUN Secretariat are to plan, organize, co-ordinate, monitor and evaluate AUN programmes and activities as well as to propose and develop ideas and innovations as mechanisms for the sourcing and generation of funds for the self-reliant and self-sustaining operation of AUN.

AUN has grown rapidly with its collaborative activities currently comprising over 20 projects, including those within ASEAN and with its dialogue partners. One of its activities worth mentioning here is the ASEAN Studies Programme. The Master's Course in ASEAN Studies is perceived as the main device to help enhance awareness, solidarity and identity of the region.

The programme captures all aspects of the region's cultures, politics and economy into a graduate course that provides all attendants with a good level of understanding of ASEAN. The course was launched for the first time in October 2006 and a total of nine students were accepted in the programme. In the long run, we hope that the MA Course in ASEAN Studies will promote a sense of ASEANness among our people, and at the same time, serve as an information gateway for outsiders who wish to understand ASEAN.

Another ASEAN solidarity-building activity is the Annual AUN Education Forum and Young Speakers' Contest, a two-week work camp aiming to familiarise the participants with the ASEAN context which, in effect, would help build ASEAN spirit among the participants. Moreover, the exchange under the AUN Student and Faculty Exchange Programme promotes co-operation among scholars/academicians and seeks to increase mobility among AUN students and staff in AUN Member Universities. Specifically, the AUN launched a project on 'Enhancing Higher Education Management in CLMV Countries', in line with the vision of the ASEAN leaders who initiated 'the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI)' at the Fourth ASEAN Informal Summit in Singapore, in November 2000. This project aims to narrow the development gaps between ASEAN Six and the CLMV countries, so as to ensure smooth integration of these countries into the regional grouping.

Functioning as the organisation that promotes human resource development within the region, the AUN has also established partnerships with ASEAN's Dialogue Partners. In 2000, the AUN signed the Financing Agreement with the European Commission which led to the establishment of the ASEAN-EU University Network Programme (AUNP). ASEAN benefited greatly from the partnership with the EU under the AUNP. The Conferences/Meetings organised were platforms for both ASEAN and the EU scholars/academicians to share knowledge and exchange ideas. European experts, recruited with the technical assistance of the AUNP, assisted us on priority issues. ASEAN scholars also had an opportunity to co-operate with European scholars in conducting research on topics of mutual interest for a maximum duration of two years, with the financial support of the AUNP. Sadly, the AUNP was a six-year programme and came to an end in April 2006.

The AUN/Southeast Asia Engineering Education Development Network (AUN/SEED-Net) was inaugurated in April 2001 as an autonomous sub-network of the AUN. The AUN/SEED-Net receives financial support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Japan-ASEAN Solidarity Fund through the ASEAN Foundation. The objective of the AUN/SEED-Net is to enhance the level of education and research of engineering departments in ASEAN countries as well as to strengthen the network in the field of engineering between universities in ASEAN and in Japan. Activities under AUN/SEED-Net mainly include Master's Degree Programmes, Doctoral Degree Programmes (within Member Institutions and in Japan), Field-wise Activities (providing a well-designed support system for enhancing human resource development in the various engineering fields), IT-Enhanced Courseware Development Project, and Regional Conference Programme.

Politically, universities are tools that harmonise the nation or region. A partnership of local universities in one country will protect the local education system from international challenges. A group of universities can stimulate a sense of nationalism among its people by, for example, raising the importance of national language and culture. In a broader perspective, regional co-operation in higher education indicates an attempt to seek harmonisation of differences between nations. The AUN realises that ASEAN members are varied in culture, politics and systems of governance. In attempting to lead ASEAN towards a common standard and quality in the educational field, the AUN has adopted the AUN-Quality Assurance as a guideline to be implemented among AUN member universities. We are proud to say that we are reaching the final step in a journey towards the AUN-QA. The Guidelines of the AUN-QA have been published and the Manual in Implementing the AUN-QA Guidelines is now being developed. Hopefully, the AUN shall publish a manual of the AUN-QA guidelines by the end of 2008, and shall distribute both the guidelines and the manual to our members and interested parties. This initiative will be exemplary of the great accomplishment in harmonisation possible among ASEAN member countries. By way of this initiative, they will soon standardise education in the region.

So far, AUN has accomplished a great deal in supporting member countries in improving their human resources through educational activities and will keep up its promise to turn ASEAN into a healthy educational community of the future. More details about these activities are available on the AUN website at www.aun-sec.org.

Conclusion

A viable response to globalization is neither to oppose, nor to isolate one's country from the numerous impacts, positive and negative alike, it entails. As I have pointed out, globalizing pressures are unavoidable. Hence, the only possible alternative is to engage in international cooperation in ways that would most fruitfully cope with, and even benefit from, globalizing trends. I sincerely believe that a networking arrangement such as the AUN is one such way.

In closing, I would like to iterate that Asia should aim only to benefit from the prevailing globalizing trends. Given our long history and valuable experiences, we have a lot to offer the world as well. Even though the idea of "Asian values" is vague with both positive and negative implications,³ Asia has its own strengths that could serve as a solid basis for its collaborative arrangements within the region and beyond. The idea is that the world could benefit from the wealth of knowledge and experiences that Asia will be able to offer.

³ See Jeon-Kyu Lee, "Asiatic Values in East Asian Higher Education: From a Standpoint of Globalization", *Globalization* (2005) <http://globalization.icaap.org/content/v5.1.html>

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