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**Comparing European and East Asian  
Experiences in Higher Education Regionalism<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> This paper partly draws on Chapter 6 of this author's book titled *Global Multi-level Governance: European and East Asian Leadership*. (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2007), [www.unu.edu/unupress/2007/multilevelGovernance.html](http://www.unu.edu/unupress/2007/multilevelGovernance.html).

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**

Europe has been trying to converge its higher education systems for the past sixty years. It created some regional institutions and the graduate level, first the College of Europe and, later, the European University Institute. Since the late eighties the European Commission has successfully promoted the mobility of students and faculty through the Socrates-Erasmus programme. And nowadays, 46 European countries are trying to more jointly dynamise all elements of their universities through the so-called Bologna process. European universities are also getting ready to work with innovative companies with the impetus of a new Institute of Technology. In the meantime, East Asian countries are quickly transforming their university systems to be more globally competitive. This includes an increasingly noticeable effort to find ways to cooperate within their regions. Initial efforts to create linkages in ASEAN countries, and later by linking to America and Europe, were rather weak. Yet, in the past few years, a number of political agreements in Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, and among ASEAN+3 countries include a greater exchange of student and faculty. As the process is a difficult one, the role of external partners remains important. Noticeable is the effort to create a pan-Asian intellectual catalyser by reviving the ancient university of Nalanda in India.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Europe, Asia, Regionalism

## ***The First “Universities”***

Having learnt the painful lessons of the wars in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, European governments created unique postgraduate institutions to study, research and influence peaceful European integration.<sup>2</sup>

The College of Europe ([www.coleurope.be](http://www.coleurope.be)) started in 1949 as the world's first academic institute of postgraduate studies and training in European affairs, and despite its growth and evolution it remains rather unique to this day. The College's origins date back to the Pan-European 1948 Den Hague Congress, when Salvador de Madariaga, a Spanish statesman, thinker and writer in exile, proposed the establishment of a College where university graduates from many different countries could study and live together. A group of private citizens were successful in attracting the College to Bruges, near Brussels, and one of the intellectual leaders of the track-2 European Movement became its first rector. In the wake of the changes in Central and Eastern Europe following the end of the Cold War, at the invitation of the Polish government and with the support of the European Union, a second campus was opened in Natolin outside of Warsaw in 1994. The College has always been a mainly intergovernmental institution, as European member states select and fund most of the students and the Belgian and Polish authorities fund much of the physical infrastructure. Yet, the European Union has increasingly provided structural help and a growing number of private foundations and firms help in particular areas of study and research.

Students and faculty reflect a great diversity of culture and backgrounds that successfully interact together. Over 400 students coming from nearly 50 countries share, during 10 months, master courses in law, economics, politics and administration, and live together in dormitories. They must work fluently in English and French, although most speak several languages, which facilitates a successful career in European institutions or elsewhere where there is a European interest. The College's alumni association counts twenty-four groups in more than eighteen countries and works within a network of more than eight thousand former students. Faculty is drawn from the top experts in academia and administration around Europe. They rush to teach only for a few days each semester, with preparatory administrative work being done by resident research assistants having been chosen from among the best graduates of previous years.

Although the College has been very successful, it needs to constantly adapt itself to excel beyond the growing supply of European teaching programmes. Its new development office provides a wide range of professional training courses, organises conferences, workshops, and tailor-made professional seminars, sets up institutional and academic co-operation projects and provides research, consultancy and technical assistance activities in its growing areas of expertise. The College increasingly collaborates with partners around the world, and in 2006 it started a new English masters programme in EU International Relations and Diplomacy. However, its networked nature and location precludes it from opening new campuses, as many people would like.

After decades of discussions, and spurred by the social transformations of the 1968 movement, European intellectual cooperation further flourished with the creation in 1976

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<sup>2</sup> Palayet, Jean-Marie (1996) *A university for Europe : prehistory of the European University Institute in Florence (1948-1976)*. Rome: Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministry.

of the European University Institute ([www.eui.eu](http://www.eui.eu)) in an abbey outside of Florence. The EUI is the first intergovernmental European doctoral research and training centre in the social sciences. It took many years of discussion to reach only partial agreements on its structure, funding, culture and intellectual objectives. Its first students and faculty lived together, but much movement took place. Research students had to maintain strong links with home universities, and after the three-year grants were consumed they often left Florence for good. Over the years the value of Institute doctorates increased and large numbers of candidates applied for limited places. The Institute's four original departments (law, politics and sociology, economics, history and civilisation) gradually grew and were complemented, since the 1990s, with interdisciplinary, applied policy research centres and annual research programmes, as well as post-doctoral research positions. Despite its reputation, financial and location incentives, the Institute has always had some difficulties in attracting and retaining prominent faculty from afar, as they may only be there continuously for a period of four years, renewable once. Thus, the more permanent administrative staff quickly gained unusual powers to influence the development of the otherwise rich and rather anarchic academic debates reflecting the full variety of European (and often North American) debates in the social sciences and of cultures. As in the case of the College of Europe, the Institute is under pressure to adapt to global developments. It has thus been trying to promote the intake of more students from outside Europe, and has developed study and research programmes focusing on some parts of the world, and Asia represents a new target region.

Inspired by the unique but qualified successes of the College of Europe and the European University Institute, newer and specialised pan-European teaching institutions appeared. The European Institute of Public Administration ([www.eipa.eu](http://www.eipa.eu)) opened in the early 1980s in Maastricht to train public administrators from European governments. In addition, the Academy of European Law ([www.era.int](http://www.era.int)) was created in the early 1990s, favoured by European institutions and with the collaboration of Luxembourg, the nearby German city of Trier, and the Land of Rhineland-Palatinate, while a growing number of governments from European countries have become financial patrons.

### ***Erasmus Community Programmes***

The pace of setting-up regional higher education and research institutions was too slow for the times, forcing Europe to implement new structural answers. Since the late 1960s, social revolutions and the mobility of working migrants were beginning to pressure higher education systems to open and collaborate at the European level. The Treaty of Rome of 1957, establishing the European Communities, only allowed the federalising European Commission to assist the then six member states in vocational training as a complementary measure to promote the mobility of workers, one of the key liberties behind the formation of the single European market. Yet, in 1984, the European Court of Justice interpreted that all education is vocational training, allowing the European Commission to soon promote European higher education programmes.

The directorate for education and training within the Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture (<http://ec.europa.eu/education/>) now proposes and manages several strategic initiatives, the most relevant is the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus, also the name of a

famous philosopher from the 16<sup>th</sup> century). Established in 1987, the Erasmus programme was the first comprehensive action on interuniversity co-operation for student and, to a lesser extent, faculty mobility. Socrates, a broader education programme, has continued and extended the Erasmus action in higher education since 1995. In Socrates' first phase, Erasmus managed around 200 projects, focusing beyond the earlier networking of single university departments and more on promoting a broader university mobility and curriculum innovation. The second phase of the growing Socrates programme, running in the seven year period of 2000-2006, advanced eight actions/areas that reflect the individual's progression through the learning life cycle, from pre-school and school education (Comenius), then on through higher education (Erasmus) and finally even into adult education (Grundtvig). It also included several transversal actions like Lingua (for language learning) and Minerva (for open and distance learning and the use of info-communications technologies). In Socrates' second phase, Erasmus counted large sums to support and catalyse not only physical exchanges of students and faculty, but also to broadly develop content; thus, it placed more emphasis on teaching staff exchanges, on recognising the credits accumulated for taking similar courses in different countries, on transnational curriculum development (Europass) and on pan-European thematic networks. Moreover, Socrates promoted a thorough comparative analysis of education systems and policies, and the exchange of information and experience to help formulate and implement educational policies around the EU. In other words, through the Socrates programme, the European Union has been helping change national university systems to help Europeanise at home, the majority of students that are not yet very mobile.

The number of education establishments participating in the Erasmus programmes has reached about 2200, that is, basically all relevant universities in the European Union and associated neighbouring countries. In the 1987-2007 period about 1.5 million students have studied abroad for one-two semesters. The current goal is to reach 3 million students by 2012. The cumulative number of Erasmus teachers is nearly 20,000, a number that indicates that teachers are proportionally more mobile than students, although they tend to move for shorter periods.

Nowadays, there is a large number of intra-European university networks and associations focusing on various, broader and narrower, aspects of higher education. Several groups of universities stand out for their goals to collaborate on issues of internationalisation. There are also many other groupings focusing on European sub-regions. Furthermore, there are many university associations of teachers, students, managers and rectors, many thematic ones (medicine, law, business, etc), also focusing on technical colleges and, more recently, on online course delivery. They have all been active in giving some input on European collaboration, which has facilitated a basic consensus for further reform.

The European Union budget for the third Socrates phase, the period 2007-2013, included a noticeable increase in its allocation for education, and groups all the above programmes into a grand concept of life-long learning that should more broadly benefit national economies and societies. But we have to remember that the European Union has limited treaty prerogatives in higher education, so Socrates-Erasmus actions can only complement the transformation of higher education systems which are still under the

prerogatives of member states' governments or under the prerogatives of sub-state regions in federal countries like Germany or Spain.

### ***The Broad-based European Higher Education Area***

Given the treaty limitations of the European Union in the higher education sector to exact the need for broader structural adaptation, a more powerful but complementary mechanism has been put in place to create a European Higher Education Area. It is usually referred to as the Bologna Process ([www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/)), deriving its name from the so-called Bologna Declaration, which was signed in that Italian city in June 1999 by ministers in charge of higher education from 29 European countries. It is an intergovernmental and pan-European reform process envisaged to homogenise study programmes and credits, and to further allow students, graduates and faculty to benefit from unhampered mobility and equitable access to high quality higher education by 2010. The Bologna Process has advanced through a solid work programme that receives orientations from ministerial conferences every two-years (Prague 2001, Berlin 2003, Bergen 2005, London 2007, Benelux - Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve 2009). These conferences are prepared by a Bologna Follow-up Group, which is in turn supported by a relaying Bologna Secretariat. Currently, 46 countries participate and many more are following the developments from a distance.

There are several keys to achieving this European higher education space. All higher education systems should be restructured into globally compatible three-cycle structures (three-four years for undergraduate programmes, one-two years for master programmes, and doctoral degrees). Degrees must be easily readable and comparable through an explanatory European degree supplement. Course credits must be based on the actual work of students', not faculty. Quality must be assured.

The difficult but sustained success of driving the revolutionary Bologna process comes from a partnership approach in both policy-making and implementation. Besides member countries, various international organisations are involved (European Commission, the Council of Europe based in Strasbourg), and European associations representing higher education institutions, students, staff and employers. While the goal of being globally competitive is crucial, it has also maintained the social dimension as it emphasises participative equity and employability of graduates in a lifelong learning context. And, it has drawn on the best existing pan-European tools: the 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention advanced by the Council of Europe; the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System based on students' work first advanced in the Erasmus programme; the overarching qualifications framework and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, this last one is planned to function as admission criteria for quality assurance and accreditation agencies in the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies, which is currently being set up.

### ***Future Prospects for Collaborative Knowledge***

European knowledge structures first began to converge through elite post-graduate institutions, and then picked-up speed through the opening and structural transformation of existing universities. Not to lose momentum, Europe is nowadays establishing a new

knowledge framework to address the global challenge of technological and economic competition.

The European Council meeting in 2000 launched a Lisbon Strategy aiming to reform the European Union into “the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world” by 2010. The grandiose goal cannot be achieved this decade, but the European Commission put forward in 2006 a proposal to establish a European Institute of (Innovation and) Technology (<http://ec.europa.eu/eit/>) as an integral part of a revised Lisbon Strategy for growth and employment, aiming to reinforce Europe’s capacity to transform education and research results into business opportunities.

This visionary proposal has quickly developed, thanks to extensive consultations with many European stakeholders, member states and the general public. Indeed, the European Competitiveness Council swiftly reached, in November 2007, a political agreement to set up the EIT by Community legislation in spring 2008, with a budget of 309 million euros for the period 2008-2013. A governing board drawn from business and academia became ready in the summer of 2008 to establish by 2010, the first long-term autonomous knowledge & innovation communities made of universities, research organisations, companies and other stakeholders to drive cutting-edge innovation of key economic and societal interest.

These communities of excellence should transform higher education at the master and doctoral levels to generally lead in the expansion of human capital, and in particular, to adapt education and training systems in response to new competence requirements. They would encourage the recognition in member states of the EIT degrees and diplomas awarded by partner higher education institutions.

Although France had strongly lobbied for it to be in Paris, its final hub location became Budapest, a city that bridges between west and east. The EIT hopes to become a symbol and a reference of a more networked European Innovation, Research and Education Area that will inspire and drive change around the European Union and beyond.

The European institutions, programmes and structural agreements aimed at transforming and helping converge Europe’s higher education systems, must always have an active external dimension. The Erasmus programmes, for example, have inspired global Erasmus-Mundus activities. Similarly, the Bologna process has become so fascinating that many other parts of the world are trying to link to it, to profit from it and even to develop similar regional transformations. As the EIT will do in the future, the Bologna process already welcomes these developments. It has established and plans to work with dynamic stakeholders that share European values, as expressed in its recent strategy for the European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting.

## **East Asian Higher Education Cooperation**

When analysing higher education developments in East Asian countries, we see very different cases that nevertheless also show signs of regional convergence and sustained global linkages. China and other countries shaped by Confucian ethics have traditionally valued education as the main personal basis of development. Nowadays, provision of higher education in the Asia region is more varied than ever, allowing newer

paths of cooperative development with each other and globally. Japan has long allowed the creation of many private universities to complement the ones funded by the national and local governments, which are now under pressure to compete more autonomously. Although many Japanese study in the USA or in Europe, most of Japan's inward foreign students come from China and other East Asian countries, a trend that is bound to increase with the announcement on 22 May 2008 of the 'New Fukuda Doctrine' ([www.kantei.go.jp/jp/hukudaspeech/2008/05/22speech.html?ref=rss](http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/hukudaspeech/2008/05/22speech.html?ref=rss)). Mao's China basically closed its universities during the Cultural Revolution, and only in the 1980s did it embark on a path of recovery and catching up with the industrial world, with the introduction of the market economy and the growing demand for qualified manpower. The large demand for higher education has forced the growth in the number and variety of means of education delivery, which has naturally included international solutions. China remains the most significant source of international students, and a growing number of them now go to Japan and several thousand go to other East Asian countries.<sup>3</sup> However, the regional trend is even more visible in the intake of foreign students, as the majority come from South Korea and Japan to study not only language and culture, but modern curricula of global interest. And caught in the middle of this educational typhoon, the South Korean government announced in 2005 a plan to reverse the relative decline of its higher education system in a way that keeps regional and global links.<sup>4</sup>

Southeast Asian countries at first promoted nation building through education, but now they all feel challenged to allow more avenues of personal development.<sup>5</sup> To meet the increasing student demand, universities are training academic and institutional staff, developing new curricula, and searching for funds, as they transition into more or less private institutions. Their new competitive strategies increasingly involve transnational solutions, at first global, but more recently also regional. Singapore and Malaysia have been leading in attracting foreign students and campuses, while Thailand and the Philippines have endeavoured to host regional policy institutions.

Given the mixed historical record in Southeast and Northeast Asia, one should not be surprised that their current search for regional dimensions in the development of their higher education systems is still different from what we saw above regarding Europe.

### ***The First Initiatives in Southeast Asia***

The first regional initiative for higher education collaboration came from a small, but open group. The Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning ([www.seameo.org/asaihl/](http://www.seameo.org/asaihl/)) was founded in 1956 as a non-governmental organisation, at a meeting in Bangkok attended by the heads of eight state universities in the region. The association is still administered through a general conference, an administrative board and a secretariat. It is a clearinghouse of information: it assists member institutions in the recruitment and placement of faculty and staff, in exchanges of professors and students,

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<sup>3</sup> Xinhua News Agency, 19 January 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Park, Kyung-Jae (2005) "Policies and Strategies to Meet the Challenges of Internationalization of Higher Education" Government Speech at The Third Session of the Regional Follow-up Committee for the 1998 World Conference on Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific, Seoul, 5 July.

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau of Education (2006) *Higher Education in South-East Asia*. Bangkok.

and in the development of cooperative arrangements on specific projects. And it grants a token number of fellowships, but given its meagre resources, ASAIHL has sought global linkages to survive, and nowadays it includes many Asian members, as well as others from developed countries.

Next came the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organisation ([www.seameo.org](http://www.seameo.org)), which was established in 1965 as a result of a meeting held in Bangkok between the education ministers of Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the then Republic of (South) Viet Nam, the chairperson of UNESCO national commission of Philippines, and a special adviser to the U.S. president. SEAMEO has a wide remit to promote cooperation in education, science and culture, but it too has linked outside the region to prosper. It currently includes the ten ASEAN countries as regular members and East Timor, while a few Western countries are associate members; meanwhile, the International Council for Open and Distance Education is an affiliate, and Japan is a donor country. SEAMEO has grown into a network of regional centres to promote training of specialists, including the Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development (RIHED), and since 1997 it is complemented with a Regional Open Learning Centre. Tens of thousands of professionals from the region (and beyond) have participated in its training courses, professional technical conferences, seminars, and workshops. But only a few thousand people have participated in its graduate degree programmes.

SEAMEO shares offices in Bangkok with UNESCO's Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education ([www.unescobkk.org](http://www.unescobkk.org)). Through the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific, UNESCO-Bangkok provides limited financial and technical assistance, and sustains an overall policy debate for reform. It sometimes assists developing countries in a subregional fashion, as in the plan to establish a Greater Mekong Virtual University, by focusing on quality assurance and mutual recognition issues, and promoting regional networks.

In the meantime, ASEAN countries began exploring collaboration ([www.aseansec.org/8584.htm](http://www.aseansec.org/8584.htm)). An ASEAN Committee on Education first met in 1975 in Manila, where two years later the first gathering of ASEAN Ministers of Education took place, but without any relevance for higher education collaboration. Finally, the ASEAN Summit of 1992 reaffirmed ASEAN studies and an ASEAN University as priorities for education cooperation and also urged that student exchanges at secondary and tertiary levels be implemented as a strategy for promoting awareness of ASEAN. An ASEAN University Network ([www.aun-sec.org](http://www.aun-sec.org)) began operations in a few years to manage incipient collaborative programmes (master studies, short-term exchanges of students and faculty, and scholarships), information networking, and even collaborative research, and planned an ASEAN Virtual University. But reflecting its very limited resources, output was very limited, forcing them to link more globally to procure themselves more assets.

### ***Linking to America and Europe***

East Asian countries are becoming increasingly interlinked, partly through smarter linkages with external partners and regions. Trans-regional links with the US are nowadays complemented with ideas coming from Europe and beyond.

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation organization had its first education ministerial in 1992, when it created an Education Forum within its Human Resources Working Group to advance various projects in different levels of education ([www.apecneted.org](http://www.apecneted.org)). Only in 2000 did APEC hold a second ministerial, where it was decided to transform the Education Forum into an Education Network. Being based in Taiwan, however, it helped little in regional cooperation. Complementary initiatives, within or around APEC, in the higher education sector have had a useful but limited projection.

Various Asia-Pacific academic networks have appeared to stimulate cooperation, although with very limited success. A consortium of APEC study centres was launched in 1993 to promote studies and research on APEC issues. Meanwhile, the Association of Pacific Rim Universities ([www.apru.org](http://www.apru.org)) was created in 1997 with a base in Singapore to link the chief executives of leading universities in APEC, hoping to stimulate cooperation in teaching and research on various issues. In addition, there is the geographically broader Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific (<http://auap.sut.ac.th/>), formed in 1995 in a conference at Suranaree University of Technology in Thailand. Its broad membership includes universities from Iran, India, Bangladesh, US, Australia, Japan and UNESCO, advancing an operational plan that focuses on management, teaching, research, international linkages, information dissemination, and attracting new members.

Meanwhile, Australia independently promoted in 1991 the structurally more challenging University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific ([www.umap.org](http://www.umap.org)) scheme to complement APEC's intergovernmental activities. Since 1993, UMAP exists as a voluntary association (with a secretariat moved from Tokyo to Bangkok) of governments and non-governmental representatives aiming to increase the mobility of university students and staff. Participating universities first recognise credits for one-two semesters abroad and, since 1998, based on the Erasmus experience in Europe, a pilot project was trying to achieve a broader credit transfer scheme and recognition of qualifications. But the report on the UMAP credit transfer scheme presented to the Board in March 2003 highlighted the difficulties with its use and generally limited understanding and knowledge across the Asia-Pacific. Moreover, UMAP does not even have the resources to provide basic statistical information on student mobility. UMAP changed course and began advertising itself as "a vehicle for governments and regional organisations interested in supporting the UMAP vision".

East Asian countries soon approached Europe to further internationalise their higher education systems. Upon the creation of the ASEAN University Network, the ASEAN-EU University Network Programme was launched in 2000 to enhance cooperation between higher education institutions, promote regional integration within ASEAN countries and strengthen the mutual awareness of European and Asian cultural perspectives. It was complemented with the Asia-Link Programme, an initiative by the European Commission to promote regional and multilateral networking between higher education institutions in countries from the European Union, South Asia, South-East Asia and China.

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) process is becoming a more useful mechanism for East Asian regional cooperation, as it has helped bring Southeast and Northeast Asia peacefully together for their first time in history when it first convened in Bangkok in 1996. Since the ASEM-2 summit in London in 1998, it has been exploring higher

education exchanges. An ASEM Vision Group Report released in 1999 included many specific proposals to enhance educational exchanges at various levels from students all the way up to heads of universities and ministers. The Asia-Europe Foundation ([www.ASEF.org](http://www.ASEF.org)), located in front of the APEC secretariat next to Singapore's National University campus, has promoted several pilot activities in higher education, including university networks, short-term university courses, and scholarship programmes. Moreover, ASEF has been developing policy colloquies to facilitate mobility of students and faculty, credit recognition and transfer, quality assessment, joint research and joint curriculum development and borderless education, including e-learning. And it has also begun creating databases on academic systems, programmes, exchanges and scholarships, and thematic research networks. More importantly, leaders attending the ASEM-6 summit in Helsinki emphasized that qualified human resources constitute a key factor for economic and social development. They stressed the value of continued dialogue and exchange of best practices on questions related to structured and life-long education and training, and prepared the way for the first ASEM Ministerial Meeting on Education and Qualification held in Berlin in May 2008 and in October, with the help of ASEF, the first ASEM gathering of university rectors and other education leaders.

### ***Strengthening links within East Asia***

Higher education developments in Southeast Asian countries, spurred by global and interregional connections, are now reaching out to Northeast Asia. A group of thinkers, forming part of an East Asia Vision Group ([www.aseansec.org/pdf/east\\_asia\\_vision.pdf](http://www.aseansec.org/pdf/east_asia_vision.pdf)), produced around the turn of the century, recommendations to favour educational cooperation and the promotion of a sense of identity and regional consciousness. In particular, they recommended the creation of a Network of East Asian Studies to promote exchanges and other projects on subjects relevant to contemporary East Asian development.

A group of bureaucrats behind the East Asia Study Group expanded these ideas and asked political leaders -- mindful not to mention the need for financial resources -- to promote East Asian studies in the region through cooperative programmes, the teaching of languages, the establishment of networks, and by expanding the ASEAN University Network to the rest of East Asia, profiting from existing bilateral initiatives between ASEAN and China, Japan, and Korea.

Japan then formed in 2003, an "ASEAN+3 group on facilitation and promotion of exchange of people and human resource development" that produced even more visionary education mobility goals, closer to the developments behind Europe's Bologna process ([www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/asean/conference/asean3/sg0305-r.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/asean/conference/asean3/sg0305-r.html)). East Asia should be promoting lifelong learning programs; credit transfer systems; scholarships and exchange programs for students, faculty, staff; research and development cooperation; 'centers of excellence' including those based on e-learning; and curricular development as bases for common regional qualification standards among interested institutions.

The Network of East Asian Studies ([www.neas-aseanplus3.net](http://www.neas-aseanplus3.net)) may become of salient importance as it aims to catalyse comprehensive contemporary East Asian regional knowledge, not just on atomised issues, as is often the case in classical Asia-

related exchanges. Discussions have been largely led by the University of Tokyo, coordinating discussions with leading universities in Northeast and Southeast Asia. The University of Tokyo (<http://dir.u-tokyo.ac.jp/en/kokusai/>) has also led the creation of other regional networks. The 'BESETOHA' network created in 1999, brings together top national universities located in BEijing, SEoul, TOKyo, and HAnoi. The Association of East Asian Research Universities, dating from 1996, even links Japan to South Korea and both Chinas. The undergraduate liberal arts college of the University of Tokyo, unique among Japan's national universities, started in 2005, an East Asia Liberal Arts Initiative to bidirectionally reach to China and other neighbouring countries for discussion of difficult issues like textbook translation, and the development of public spheres. Since the rectors of the Universities of Tokyo and Beijing first met in 2000, various additional bilateral gatherings are aiming at a tripartite educational leadership. The University also influenced the creation of an (East) Asian Consortium of Political Research and other networks (ACPR). But in Japan, one may see many other universities -- Waseda University, for example -- actively promoting regional links with other institutions in East Asia.

To prepare for broader East Asian cooperation, Japan had launched in late 2001 a large-scale programme of cooperation with ASEAN countries in the field of human resources development and education. Moreover, in 2003 Japan pledged to ASEAN assistance of over US\$ 1.5 billion (through technical cooperation, grant aid and yen loans) over 3 years for human resource development with various human exchange programmes involving approximately 40,000 people: this includes receiving trainees, students and youths, and dispatching experts. These ideas are now part of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements that Japan is crafting, bilaterally, with East Asian countries with the aim of eventually weaving together and leading a regional one.

These kinds of actions have not only helped ASEAN advance in regional cooperation, but also with Northeast Asian countries, testing regional linkages.

### ***The New Drive from ASEAN***

ASEAN leaders agreed in 2005 to promote ASEAN exchanges of teachers, staff and students, as well as the creation of common content on traditional and information-communication platforms. The ASEAN University Network would be strengthened with a view to ultimately establish the ASEAN University, and it would work to promote mutual recognition of academic degrees and qualifications. In addition, ASEAN leaders agreed to establish an ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Education that would meet alongside the annual SEAMEO Meeting. Moreover, they declared that "regional coordination mechanisms for education collaboration through the ASEAN and SEAMEO forums should be synergized to work with countries beyond the Southeast Asian region and with other regional and international organisations on education" ([www.aseansec.org/17678.htm](http://www.aseansec.org/17678.htm)).

Education Ministers and senior education officials from Southeast Asian countries gathered in Singapore in 2006 for the 1<sup>st</sup> ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting (ASED) alongside the 41<sup>st</sup> SEAMEO Council Conference, as well as with partners and other representatives from the region and beyond. ASED agreed to promote an ASEAN

identity and socio-cultural community, building on the strengths of the region's multi-ethnic societies and their many unique experiences, reaffirming that education plays a key role in the promotion of regional identity and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. They then agreed to deepen and expand collaboration to other countries. Currently, many activities and programmes that enhance interactions and exchanges among students and educationists in the region are on a bilateral or regional basis. From now on ASEAN and other countries would strengthen ASEAN studies, produce resource books, enhance ICT technologies, bring students and teachers together, promote various people-to-people interactions, study how education is related to multi-ethnicity quality, find good combinations of language education that combine English with national and mother tongues, promote vocational technical education, and select and train school leaders.

All these initiatives are bound to grow as the ASEAN Charter, approved in Singapore in November 2007, further acknowledged the need to work with academic institutions. And so, the new ASEAN Secretary-General openly declared in the GIARI symposium in January 2008 his intentions for the ASEAN secretariat to become a networked institution and for the ASEAN University Network to become an educational think-tank to advance the ASEAN Charter.

### ***Incipient Northeast Asian Cooperation***

In the multi-level creation of an East Asian higher education space, the key long-term component is the consolidation of cooperation among Northeast Asian countries.

The governments of Japan, mainland China and South Korea are softly weaving many more types of bilateral people's exchanges into a more tripartite or trilateral regional space. At their November 2000 meeting, on the occasion of the ASEAN+3 Summit Meeting, the three Northeast Asian Leaders proposed measures to enhance human and cultural exchanges. This prepared the way for their 2003 Bali declaration, which included a large array of measures to promote civil society exchanges where education was highlighted: "They will enhance cooperation to expand student exchanges among their institutions of higher education, promote mutual institutions' recognition of academic records, degrees and credits, and encourage language teaching and cultural exchange among the three countries" (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/asean/conference/asean3/joint0310.html>).

The first yearly progress report of tripartite cooperation, adopted in November 2004, already indicated growth, with several cultural and people-to-people exchanges, including student exchanges and progress in mutual recognition of academic credits and records through agreements between universities. And the concomitantly adopted Action Strategy on Trilateral Cooperation, included several broad measures to enhance education cooperation: through promoting high level consultations, training of highly qualified personnel, mutual recognition of academic degrees, credits and records, and the continuation of the promotion of student exchanges among education institutions.

Although the government leaders cancelled their summit planned for 2005, lower level government officials kept advancing the education agenda. The Inaugural Korea-China-Japan Educational Director-General Meeting held in Seoul in March 2006, presented each country's educational priorities and government policy measures and discussed ways to develop diverse three-way collaboration models. This is a departure

from habitual practice, where cooperation tends to take place only in a bilateral format. There is now evidence of a more comprehensive dialogue, raised to the ministerial level. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting, a year later, they even discussed the launching of a full-fledged Education Ministers Meeting.

### ***Future Prospects For East Asia***

Despite the difficulties, East Asian governments are increasing the momentum towards regional higher education cooperation by combining a series of overlapping supranational actions.

The ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation Work Plan for the 2007-17 decade, approved the goals and objectives set forth in the joint statements on East Asia Cooperation, including several educational goals to strengthen the Network of East Asian Studies, investments in education and training, institutional and political linkages especially through the ASEAN University Network, credit transfers between universities, research activities and exchanges among scholars interested in regional issues, facilitation of visa arrangements, and the cultivation of regional identities through the promotion of ASEAN and East Asian Studies in the region.

Meanwhile, the geographically broader East Asia Summits that take place just after the ASEAN and ASEAN+3 summits are also concerned about knowledge collaboration. In its first summit in 2005, education was declared a priority issue. At the third Summit, held in 2007, political leaders welcomed the positive developments regarding plans to revive the Nalanda University, famous from Japan to the Mediterranean as a centre for Buddhist and many other studies during the 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, it will serve as a residential centre for cultural exchange and inter-religious study and understanding in the broader Asian region. A consortium led by Singapore and including China, India, Japan and other nations is raising substantial funds with the hope of establishing seven schools, with scores of faculty to impart courses in sciences, philosophy, spiritualism, among others. Nalanda's chancellor may be a renowned international scholar; perhaps someone like Amartya Sen, the head of its mentor group and praised for his arguments on economic development emphasizing the high returns of education, or someone with a more practical focus like Abdul Kalam, the weapon developer and progressive thinker who was instrumental in advancing the project while he was India's president.

If the Nalanda vision is successful, it is possible that it will catalyse networks with other, ancient, existing, and new, institutions sharing similar objectives. As East Asia reaches further West through the East Asian summit, as well as other macro-regional initiatives (Asian Cooperation Dialogue [www.acddialogue.com](http://www.acddialogue.com), Asia Middle East Dialogue [www.amed.sg](http://www.amed.sg), Asia-Europe Meeting, a renewed APEC, etc.), it may be possible that other parts of Asia (South, Central, West, North) may also want to promote their still weak regional visions for higher education collaboration by finding their unique mixes of useful Western and East Asian knowledge.

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<sup>6</sup> Sankhaliya, H. D. (1972) *University of Nalanda* [2d rev. and enl. ed.]. Dehli: Oriental Publishers.  
Shekhar, Vibhanshu (2007) *Revival of Nalanda University: Key Players and their Soft Power Diplomacy*. Dehli: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, [www.ipcs.org/IPCS-SpecialReport48-Vibhanshu.pdf](http://www.ipcs.org/IPCS-SpecialReport48-Vibhanshu.pdf).

## An Analytical Comparison

We may now make a first comparison of the key elements behind the regional adaptation of higher education systems of Europe and East Asia, as summarised in the following table:

### *Comparing Regional Cooperation in Higher Education in Europe and East Asia*

<b>Element</b>	<b>Europe (EU)</b>	<b>East Asia</b>
<b>Main policy frameworks</b>	Erasmus: European Commission's efforts to promote linkages Bologna process: Pan-European intergovernmental convergence	ASEAN+3: East Asia Vision/Study Group reports. Group on facilitation and promotion of exchange of people and human resource development. Southeast Asia: Joint SEAMEO-ASED ministerials Northeast Asia: ministerials developing
<b>Academic institutions</b>	1949-: College of Europe Masters 1975-: European University Institute 2010-: European Institute of Innovation and Technology	None yet. Nalanda in India may be an external catalyser
<b>Networks</b>	A variety of active associations	Growing number
<b>Student exchanges</b>	Erasmus: Aiming at 3 million by 2012 Bologna: allowing fuller mobility	Autonomously growing in Northeast Asia. Very incipient exchanges in ASEAN.
<b>Faculty exchanges</b>	Erasmus: Tens of thousands for short periods Bologna: encouraging fuller mobility	Very limited
<b>Content</b>	Erasmus: ECTS Bologna Process promoting structural homogenization in a global context	Declarations aiming to structural transformations
<b>External linkages</b>	Bidirectionally important	Crucial to develop
<b>Overall Assessment</b>	<b>Advanced regionalism</b>	<b>Growing regionalism</b>

Europe's early elite academic institutions that attempted to promote regional identities began experiencing, in the 1970s, the crowding of national university systems. Since the late 1980s, the European Commission's Erasmus programmes have promoted the exchange of people and their ideas. In the new century, governments across the European continent are responding to the challenges of achieving a global higher education system with the Bologna process, allowing fuller mobility of students, faculty, content and staff. While this vision faces many local and global difficulties it is already advancing with the consensus of many education stakeholders. Meanwhile, Europe is getting ready to create knowledge communities that link innovative universities with competitive private and public institutions.

In East Asia there were many diverse paths of higher education development that only recently are beginning to converge. The first regional efforts date to the late 1950s when a regional association was set up in Southeast Asia. That and subsequent regional initiatives bore at first little success as they lacked human, political, or economic resources. But in the 1990s links with North America first and Europe later spurred change and promising regional adaptation. Building on various overlapping regional and interregional networks and institutions, the ASEAN+3 East Asian countries have in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century began to converge while generally transforming their higher education systems

Europe has long had two main regional academic institutions in the social sciences, the College of Europe at the master's level and the European University Institute at the doctoral level. In addition, it is creating a new institute of technology to jointly spur higher education institutions to be competitive in a world driven by global technology and business. East Asia has not yet agreed to set up any regional academic institution, although it is possible that the project to revive the Nalanda University in India will spur similar initiatives in Southeast, Northeast or in the whole of East Asia.

Europe has many kinds of academic networks that allow all interested stakeholders to actively participate in regional cooperation processes. Meanwhile, in East Asia one may see a growing number of network -- including a promising Network of East Asian Studies supported by the ASEAN+3 summit process -- but they still seem rather elitist, thus making one wonder how they will engage other potentially active stakeholders. Perhaps the continuation of linkages with America, Europe and beyond would help.

Europe is trying to reach an accumulated total of 3 million Erasmus exchange students in the following decade, while the Bologna process aims to allow autonomous short or long-term movement of students. The order of magnitude of student movements in East Asia is still much smaller, but the speed of growth among Northeast Asian countries is possibly the greatest in the world. Meanwhile, governmental efforts to facilitate transnational contacts and the provision of funds and other needs should help meet the growing demand for higher education.

Something similar may be said regarding teaching faculty. European professors are already relatively mobile, as sizable numbers attend conferences and profit from short-term employment schemes by Erasmus or other programmes. Faculty in East Asia does not seem yet very mobile, although not only a small number of prominent professors, but also a growing number of younger faculty meet in a growing number of regional network gatherings.

Europe's efforts to create a 3-cycle higher education structure will particularly facilitate the convergence of content and the catalysis of the still immobile members of higher education institutions. Course credits and full-fledged programmes, for example, should soon be more easily recognised. Meanwhile, higher education systems in East Asia do not seem structurally incompatible among themselves, or with Europe. As in many countries, they already have a similar graduate programme structure, made up of master and doctoral cycles. Yet, the mutual recognition of non-technical programmes remains an obstacle to full-fledged regionalism. Paying attention to these from a more technical point of view, may gradually facilitate convergence. Moreover, while one may point to the many lingering differences in language, religion, ethics, demography or

economic development that affect East Asian higher education systems, one may also identify a pragmatism in searching for more common peaceful development without excluding others. English is useful as a regional lingua franca, and global human values really have some common value. Furthermore, the mobility of human resources is encouraged in a variety of ways to help match supply and demand, and in this vein, richer countries make an effort to help poorer ones.

Overall we see a convergence of European and East Asian initiatives, which increases the potential of lasting cooperation and the exploration of global synergies. While Europe's efforts to regionalise higher education systems is more advanced, with most public and private actors having reached a consensus, the dynamic East Asian model is quite interesting for the variety of paths available to help the convergence of their systems. The ASEM process will look into those prospects in more depth as of this year. But to help advance useful linkages around the world, both Europe and East Asia should discuss collaboration in their external projections towards other countries, regions, and global organisations like UNESCO and the WTO. Neither European nor East Asian regional projects should try to avoid global linkages. Instead, they should aim to facilitate the diverse local goals of a growing number of thoughtful and responsible people to link more globally.

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