Working Paper

2009-E-1

Possibilities and Challenges in Constructing a New Regional

Collaborative Educational

Framework in Asia

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June 2009

The primary purpose of this research was to comprehensively capture and analyze the existing activities that make up regional collaborative educational frameworks in Asia. This provided the basis for further investigation into possible avenues of cooperation aimed at the establishment of the "Asian Erasmus Plan" (hereinafter referred to as AEP).

This paper briefly overviews 10 international organizations and international university associations, as discussed in section 1, for the purpose of organizing the necessary points of discussion that will enable the construction of a new regional collaborative educational framework in Asia.

1. The significance of exploring collaborative regional educational frameworks in Asia

Research on educational policies has basically aimed to cover the decision-making process related to educational policies at the national and increasingly at the decentralized local levels. The establishment of UNESCO in the aftermath of the Second World War has created new space for actors from international organizations such as the World Bank and UNESCO to actively play a role in the process of planning educational policies particularly in developing countries. As presented in research conducted by Philips Jones (2005), discussions of international decision-making processes of educational policies at the global level have increased. However, with exceptions in Europe, where significant progress has been made in regional integration, research on the regional-level decision-making processes or frameworks in the field of educational development has not garnished much attention within the field of international educational policy research. Furthermore, there is hardly any research in this regard for the East Asia region. Within ASEAN, discussions on the issue of regional integration have taken a firm rooting only within the last ten years. Moreover, the fact that the First East Asia Summit was not held until 2005 reveals that, generally speaking, interest in looking at practices and policies for a regional framework were not high in general, including in the education sector. In recent years, the direction of discussions on ASEAN integration, specifically with regard to the framework of an "East Asian Community" at an intergovernmental level and over the long-term, suggests that there is widespread recognition of the need to consider economic integration as a pressing policy task to be addressed by the constituent members. The role of higher education harmonization has been recognized as playing a vital role in this integration.

With regard to higher education, regional exchange within Asia and collaboration between governments and institutions has increased rapidly. Whereas the interdependent economies of the region where the only sign of deep regional integration in the past, nowadays one can also point to an interdependent relationship between education systems in the region.

Furthermore, at the Second East Asia Summit, an agreement was made to promote regional educational cooperation. Prior to the Fourth East Asian Summit, the Meeting on Higher Education of ASEAN+3 countries was held in Phuket, Thailand, the outcomes of which suggest dramatic changes in the environment surrounding educational cooperation in the Asian region. It can be considered both timely and practical, therefore, to endeavor to capture and analyze the history and activities of the existing frameworks in the Asian region in order to construct the AEP.

2. Patterns of Asian regional educational frameworks

This research focuses on 10 organizations; a mix of international organizations and university associations, which are considered to have particular relevance in any discussion aimed at the construction a new regional collaborative educational framework in Asia: ASEAN[1], SEAMEO[2], APEC[3], UNESCO[4], ADB[5], AUN[6], AUN/SEED-Net[7], APRU[8], UMAP[9] and APQN[10]. These 10 organizations have been further subdived into the categories offered below.

A first division is established according to member affiliations. For instance, the 10 international organizations can be divided into two groups. Firstly, members of ASEAN, SEAMEO, APEC, UNESCO and ADB are represented by national governments whereas members of organizations such as AUN, AUN/Seed-Net, APRU, UMAP and APQN are comprised of universities and academic institutions. Moreover, within the same university network, organizations such as AUN and APRU have established limits to their membership, targeting top universities, whereas in organizations such as UMAP, membership is a function of a wider range of universities where membership is applied through respective national governments or university associations.

A second division is made according to target regions. Organizations such as ASEAN, SEAMEO, AUN and AUN/Seed-Net base their activities in the ASEAN region. By contrast, APEC, APRU, UMAP, APQN and UNESCO are organizations that target the Asia-Pacific region on a broader scale. UNESCO is a global organization whereas the UNESCO-Asia Pacific

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[1] Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)
[2] Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO)
[3] Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)
[4] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
[5] Asian Development Bank (ADB)
[6] ASEAN University Network (AUN)
[7] ASEAN University Network/Southeast Asia Engineering Education Development Network (AUN/SEED-Net)
[8] Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU)
[9] University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP)
[10] Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN)

Regional Bureau for Education promotes regional activities including in South Asia and Central Asia. In regard to the membership of the ADB, we note that although its members are comprised of developed countries from outside the region, its substantive scope of activities corresponds to that of UNESCO.

Furthermore, there are other ways of categorizing the organizations above, besides the ones already mentioned. For example, it is possible to focus instead on target sectors and institutional mission, among other possible categories. What can be noticed by grouping these organizations into categories is that within the regional higher education framework in Asia, not only governments, but universities and evaluation institutions as well, interact in a complementary way with government organizations. For instance with regards to AUN, not only is it the main university network in ASEAN, but it is also charged with overseeing the entire regional higher education sector within ASEAN. Similarly, the APQN, a non-governmental private international institution, also plays an important policy-making function.

From a geographical standpoint, regional cooperation in the field of education in Asia has developed along two axes, cooperation in the ASEAN region and in the Asia-Pacific. The regional frameworks for policy-making and coordination, namely ASEAN+3 and the East Asia Summit, both of which boast an increase in activities recently, do not yet include an educational cooperation element to them. Thus, if the AEP is to be presented in the meetings of ASEAN+3 or in the East Asia Summit, it will be the first educational framework to be embedded there.

Furthermore, by outlining these organizations according to target sectors and operational missions, we conclude that there are institutions which target education as one of the sectors of regional integration or one of the various development sectors while other institutions focus more specifically on the promotion of regional exchanges of universities or quality assurance of higher education. This is evidence that such frameworks are multi-layered, playing a complementary role with one another. Although this research argues that the majority of institutions place importance in establishing cooperative relationships and partnerships with other regional frameworks, it also insists that cooperation develops according to the multi-layered functional roles of institutions.

3. Asian Erasmus Plan (AEP): Four challenges

In order to construct the Asian version of the Erasmus Plan which is to represent a new regional higher education framework in East Asia, let us examine the existing challenges arising from the analysis made on the 10 aforementioned organizations.

(1) Challenges regarding the target regions of the Asian Erasmus Plan (AEP)

Firstly, defining the region the AEP is to target and ultimately operate in remains a challenge. As was previously noted, the region in question is divided along two axes: Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific. A regional framework represents each geographical axis. However, a higher education framework bringing together the three countries of Northeast Asia (Japan, China and South Korea), as well as ASEAN countries, does not yet exist. This is an important challenge to establishing any semblance of policy coherence in the region. International students who study at higher education institutions in ASEAN are in majority international students from China. The rapid increase in the number of international students from China in Southeast Asian higher education institutions has set these institutions on a path of internationalization.

Furthermore, several achievements made with regard to agreements between universities, along with the creation of institutions based abroad and teacher exchanges shows just how closely Japanese and ASEAN universities are linked with one another. Taking this into account, the need to construct a higher education framework under ASEAN+3 is evident and the framework envisaged would address issues relevant to both ASEAN member countries and countries of Northeast Asia. With regards to Japan, China and South Korea, international student exchanges and university exchanges are currently progressing rapidly, a pattern which is not found in other parts of the world and which leads one to conclude that there is a certain *de facto* integration. Yet in spite of the growing links and collaboration between Northeast Asian countries in the field of higher education, no framework exists within this region to coordinate policy measures in higher education.

Similar to the "East Asia Community" framework being discussed within ASEAN's main policy coordination frameworks (ASEAN+3 or the East Asia Summit), it is important to emphasize the importance of discussing a way forward within the realm of higher education, based on the frameworks of ASEAN (like SEAMEO or AUN), which are taking the lead in policy coordination at a regional level in Asia. Moreover, further engagement by Japan, China and South Korea will enhance the growth of this Asian framework. In regard to regional integration in East Asia, it is considered vital to utilize the "Reverse Hub-and-Spoke System", whereby ASEAN, representing a relatively weak economy, will try to engage stronger economies like China and Japan through FTA agreements. This is opposed to using the "Hub-and-Spoke System" where big nations and larger markets play a central role, working to involve surrounding countries and markets (Yamamoto 2007, Baldwin 2006). Such a system of regional development may also be considered relevant in constructing a new regional framework of higher education.

It is equally important to consider the target regions functionally. Countries like Australia, New Zealand and India, which are all members of the East Asia Summit, play a

pivotal role in the internalization of higher education in the region – this is particularly true of the two countries from Oceania. The important role these countries play justifies their inclusion in any new framework. In this regard, it leaves the question of what is to be done about the involvement of the United States given its long history of educational exchanges with the Asian region and moreover, its strong influence in many other policy circles. Bearing in mind the extremely large and developed higher education in the US, it is a challenge to maintain the cohesion of the regional framework without considering involvement from the US. A challenge also remains when considering the inclusion of countries like Mexico, Chile or Peru (APEC member countries) where international exchanges and cooperation between Asia has not yet developed.

On the one hand, UMAP which is a framework initiated for Asia-Pacific Cooperation and which currently includes East Asian and Southeast Asian countries, as well as countries from Oceania among its members, is working as a well-functioning and robust framework. However, the fact that China plays a major role in higher education in this region and is missing as one of UMAP's member countries, seems to drastically weaken the scope, strength and relevance of UMAP. When considering regional integration and inter-regional cooperation in Asia, the tension existing between two regional groupings, the Asia-Pacific as represented in APEC and East Asia as represented in ASEAN+3, creates problems when positioning the US in relation to this issue. One example of this challenge was observed when the framework for the "East Asia Economic Group," presented by then President Mahathir of Malaysia in the 1990s, did not come into being due to a US veto. Moreover on the eve of the East Asia Summit, there are major political challenges to consider regarding the definition of the term "region"; for example in cases where participation of the two countries from Oceania and India is strongly encouraged by Japan for the purpose of counterbalancing a Chinese presence. The establishment of a regional framework for higher education needs to focus on functional improvement, more so than political interests.

(2) Challenges in the work plan for the Asian Erasmus Plan

Using existing networks and frameworks as a basis for our approach to the creation of an AEP, we must decide whether the new framework will promote elite-type exchange or mass-type exchange. Regarding the framework *between* universities, which constitutes the main subject of this research, APRU, AUN and AUN/Seed-Net respectively represent a gathering of elite universities, whereas the UMAP holds membership consisting of governments and university associations aiming at a wider exchange of students to take place. By making the Asian version of the Erasmus Plan a network and an exchange mechanism comprised of elites,

its management would be easier and in addition, make for stronger ties amongst member universities. Moreover, limiting membership to elite universities in each country would set a certain level of standards in terms of the quality of participants and activities undertaken, and would also work as a motivating agent amongst constituent universities. In particular, when considering the diversity of higher education systems in Asia, educational and research standards and gaps existing at both national and international levels, and the social hierarchy embedded in some universities, it is wise to aim for an elite-type exchange at least during the initial stage of this plan. However in such a case, it is crucial to consider whether elite-type exchange benefits are able to accrue to participants within the network and how and non-members will benefit, not to mention whether such types of exchange are sustainable. Such issues need to be fully examined prior to the creation of a work plan leading to the establishment of the AEP.

A central point of discussion leading to the AEP should also address the scope of the intentioned framework. Will the AEP be meant simply to be a financial program to promote exchanges or will it coordinate higher education systems within the region and furthermore help establish an "Asian Higher Education Zone", modeling to a certain degree the Bologna Process. In comparison to UMAP which has attempted to develop international education exchanges by developing credit transfer systems or quality assurance of educational programs, the kind of support centered on the provision of financial aid to enhance international educational exchange limits the number of participating universities and moreover creates challenges of sustainability and undermines impact. AUN, a network comprised of elite universities, engages in activities related to credit transfer and quality assurance of education in order to promote sustainable student exchange and research cooperation.

The adoption of the 2006 "Brisbane Communiqué" and the 2008 "Chiba Principles", has spurred forward the activities of APQN in regard to the coordination of higher education and quality assurance in Asia, a trend that is observed in other regions of the world as well. Moreover, not only are organizations such as SEAMEO and RIHED[11] working towards assuring the flow of students within the region, but they also operate with the aim of advancing the coordination of higher education in Southeast Asia by strengthening ASEAN integration, increasing incentives to attract international students from other regions, as well as increasing economic competition within the region. With this in mind, it is necessary to consider the Asian version of the Erasmus Plan as a mechanism that will coordinate higher education within the Southeast Asian region and may help in the construction of quality assurance and credit transfer systems. In fact, such a scheme should not be limited to supporting student exchange only.

However a big challenge exists as to whether it is really possible, in Asia, to

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[11] Regional Institute of Higher Education Development (RIHED)

accomplish a Bologna-like coordination of higher education systems.   This represents a very real policy challenge. In the case of Europe, it is understood that movements towards coordination have been developed with sufficient recognition of the diversity that exist amongst higher education systems. In Asia, the gaps in diversity are not comparable to those found in Europe. For example, within AUN and AUN/Seed-Net networks of elite universities, many adjustments or activities have been undertaken in order for universities – in Singapore and Cambodia, for instance – to conduct activities together within the same network. Needless to say, in countries like China, Indonesia and the Philippines with thousands of higher education institutions operating and where there are observable gaps in the quality of education, one must ask how relevant it is to target the whole higher education sector in Asia and to discuss the issue of coordination and integration.

There are several ways to tackle this particular issue. First, there is the AUN method which adjusts its quality assurance and credit transfer systems by limiting the number of participating universities. Alternatively, there is also the method of restricting membership to only those universities that have achieved a certain level of standards. Furthermore, in parallel with APQN, an agreement has been reached to set up a network within ASEAN in the form of a sub-regional framework of UMAP, which would be similar to the "Big Mekong Delta Regional University Exchange Work Plan". This agreement ushers in the possibility of finding new opportunities for a multi-layered coordination and quality assurance mechanism similar to AUN. Nevertheless, the existing frameworks have expanded their activities based on a strong recognition of the challenges to diversity and gaps existing both at the national and international levels of higher education in Asia. Future discussions on harmonization will most probably take place on issues of assistance given to such organizations and their prospective developments.

(3) Challenges in positioning the Asian Erasmus Plan (AEP) at the international level

Various attempts have been made so far to explain the theoretical foundations of regional integration and regionalization. Two contrasting hypotheses have been used; first, the perspective drawn from the Neorealist tradition, whereby regionalism is concerned with the formation of a group by states within the region in challenge to what comes from outside the region, and second, the perspective drawn from the social structuralist tradition (analysis of regionalism based on principle, benefit and identity) whereby a region is structured with the strong influence of social and economic factors. In reality, both are, to a certain degree, convincing. These concepts may be employed to discuss the promotion of regional exchanges and harmonization of higher education in Asia, but the debate would not be complete without recognizing that the movement

toward an integrated Asian higher education zone is not simply a passive one intended to facilitate higher education cooperation based on regional mutual interdependency. Global higher education trends have been influenced by English dominance and Neoliberalism in this era of globalization and higher education in North America remains ensconced in terms of its superiority in comparison to other regions. Additionally, one should acknowledge yet another perspective that suggests that the Erasmus Plan and the Bologna Process, which have served to form the regional higher education zone in Europe, have increased the competitiveness of European higher education outside the region. This added competitiveness has prompted the Asian community to respond in kind and take a closer look at regional collaboration.

Tracing back the origin and history of higher education in Asia, one can see that higher education systems in many countries are constructed on a Western higher education model. In many Asian countries, conventional higher education systems have existed before modern times, but modern higher education systems were formed separately from the model of traditional Asian academic research systems. In countries colonized by Western nations, higher education systems and the language of instruction were imposed by colonial powers and has become the foundation of modern higher education. On the other hand, countries which have maintained their independence from colonization -- such as Japan, Thailand and China -- have sought out Western-type higher education systems at their own will in the process of constructing their own modern higher education systems. In so doing, they have co-opted many of the practices found in Western nations. After gaining independence from the colonial powers, higher education systems in Asia were localized to a certain degree, but Western characteristics were preserved.

Thereafter, with the outbreak of the Cold War, academic influence from the Soviet Union and the US reached new levels. During the post-Cold War period, with a new global marketplace and notions of globalization, the US higher education system, considered internationally competitive, has continued to hold influential power in the shaping of Asian higher education. Given this situation, Altbach puts forward the center-periphery theory of the global knowledge system and higher education. This is in turn based on dependency theory and theories of new colonialism (Altbach and Selbaratnam 1989, Altbach 1998, Altbach 2004). Rooted in this historical explanation, we find that the construction of a new regional higher education framework and university alliance in Asia can be interpreted as a challenge to the global academic system centered on Western theories.

However, is it really relevant to perceive the current higher education in Asia as

the periphery and the Western academic system as the center? Higher education in the West or produced in the West maintains its influence to a certain degree in terms of its global reach. Yet, Asian higher education going through dynamic transformations both in quantity and quality, has shed its role in the "center-periphery" structural theory, which is used to position the relationship of higher education systems between Western and non-Western countries.

Umakoshi (2004) points out the limit to the "center-periphery" theory and has found a certain value in the "East Asian Approach" or the "J-Model" (Cummings 1997) theory to understand and analyze the current higher education trends in Asia. Cummings explains the essence of what was shared throughout Asia as the human resource development strategy, what he termed the "J-Model". This theory first appeared in his work entitled, "Human Resource Development: The J-Model", the last chapter of a co-authored publication with Altbach, *The Challenge of Eastern Asian Education: Implications for America* (1997). He defines the J-Model in the following way:

1. *The state coordinates education and research with a firm emphasis both on indigenous value transmission and the mastery of foreign technology.*
2. *High priority is placed on universal primary education, while state investment at the secondary and tertiary level is limited primarily to critical areas such as engineering and the sciences.*
3. *Individual students, their families and the private sector are expected to provide critical backup for the education provided by the state.*
4. *The Asian state in seeking to coordinate not only the development but also the utilization of human resources involves itself in manpower planning and job placement and increasingly in the coordination of science and technology.*

(Cummings 1997, p 275-276)

The J-Model, needless to say, captures well the evolution of human resource development in Japan. Contrary to the suggestive subtitle of Altbach's work, Cummings work does not emphasize the American model of human resource development, but rather, points to Japan as having gained enormous influential power in the development of education systems in neighboring states such as South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and other East Asian countries. Moreover, the model purports that Japan has been a supporting pillar of human resource development in the whole of East Asia. On another note, as stated by Umakoshi, in terms of analyzing the historical development of Asian higher education,

Cummings' third point relating to a mutually complementary relationship between the state and the private sector is of great value. There is however, no large difference between discussions of the "East Asian Miracle", where East Asia's economic success was attributed to strong governments or the "Flying Geese Model" where the economic development model of Japan being transferred to East Asian states was pictured as a flight of geese. If we apply the discussion points raised by Umakoshi to the new regional higher education framework in Asia, we conclude that mutual continuity or continuous linkages between higher education and economic development will further strengthen and enhance the relationship which already exists in Asian higher education.

Hence, whether the framework or alliance becomes externally open or not becomes a crucial point. Foreign consumption of Asian goods, enabled by open markets in Asia, has had immensely positive effects on the region's economy. Now, it is an important challenge for higher education systems in Asia to consider how they will work with higher education outside their region, and how to make such cooperation sustainable in the long-term. If a regional higher education framework is conceived as standing in opposition to a model outside the region, it will not only prompt a blockade in cooperative relations, but it will certainly not contribute to the development of higher education worldwide. Higher education in Asia, which has achieved great successes with regard to standards in both education delivery and research, must remain diverse and aim for regional harmonization as well as collaborative relationships with partners outside the region. When considering such a vision, it would be useful to refer to the European higher education model, which engages the rest of the world in various types of partnerships; for instance cooperation globally by way of the Erasmus Mundus program, with Asia through ASEM, and with Africa by way of the "Nyerere Program", which can be called the African version of the Erasmus Plan undertaken in partnership with the AU.

(4) Future challenges to embedding the Asian Erasmus Plan regionally

The AEP should play the role of facilitating and promoting mutually interdependent relationships within the region through exchanges and cooperation, which has developed *de facto* outside of a regional (ASEAN+3) framework. Moreover, we must consider how ASEAN integration and the formation of the "East Asian Community," as well as political and economic ties strengthened through FTA agreements will impact the establishment of the AEP. Functional cooperation will contribute to the realization of peace through regional integration and thus the construction of the AEP, with diverse regional frameworks enhancing social economic integration, will also form the basis of political regional integration (Haas 1958). Deutsch

(1975) on the other hand, presents a theory on a pluralistic (integrated) security community which enhances regional integration by defining "region" depending on whether human value is integrated or not as a significant factor.

Yet by looking at ASEAN today, we do not necessarily observe integration of people's values or political systems. However, we do observe a situation where respect for sovereignty or external inviolability, along with a peaceful approach to conflict resolution is repeatedly reemphasized by way of international exchange (also known as the "ASEAN Way"). Due care and diligence must be used in attempting to apply a theoretical framework of regional integration to the field of higher education. The theories and perspectives as presented above by Deutsch and based on observations of European integration, along with observations made on ASEAN integration by Acharya (2001), indicate that it is not about achieving a balanced and highly standardized higher education zone as oriented in the European Bologna Process. The underlying fact is that Asian higher education is characterized by great diversity and gaps in quality. It should not be about making drastic changes or modifications to the internal higher education systems but rather aiming for harmonization in places where diverse higher education systems can be linked at points of junction. The first type "melting pot harmonization" and the latter, "mosaic harmonization" may be more helpful in clarifying the overall picture. In other words, the question is whether we aim for harmonization where we strive for a single type of standards, creating a single mold for all, or harmonization which seeks to find points of linkage. Dr. Supachai is the first Director of AUN after its founding and the incumbent Director of SEAMEO-RIHED. He has led a significant amount of research and led efforts in an attempt to construct a higher education zone in Asia. He emphasizes the need for a step–by-step approach to understanding various frameworks and to collaborate comprehensively, and in so doing we may find linkages as presented in the "mosaic-type of harmonization".

4. Aiming for a new higher educational framework in Asia

One of the clearest implications that can be drawn from this research is that in Asia there are various regional higher education frameworks and they are jointly paving the way for the formation of the Asian "Higher Education Zone". This has been done through deep collaboration with each and every actor in the region, all considered to be partners. However, there is no existing framework working under auspices of ASEAN +3 or the East Asian Summit which serves to harmonize education cooperation in the region. This is what the various actors in the region are striving for. Hence, the ASEAN frameworks of AUN or SEAMEO/RIHED should be utilized as the basis to seek possible ways of collaboration with organizations such as ADB, UMAP, APQN and others. This will likely be the key to any successful initiative that is

meant to be region-wide. At the time when the Erasmus Plan and Bologna Process were being conceptualized in Europe, it had probably undergone many trials and errors prior to its actual implementation. In order to see flourish the dream of constructing the "Asian Higher Education Zone" for the purpose of realizing peace and prosperity in Asia, cooperation and coordination between related organizations and stakeholders is greatly encouraged.

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