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**The Tokyo Convention
on Recognition –
A New Era**

Wang Libing, Wesley Teter, Xu Bingna

**Developing Responsible
Leaders and
Entrepreneurs in Asia**

Henri-Claude de Bettignies

**The World
Bank in
Cambodia**

Leang Un, Lars Boomsma

Editor's Message

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In this fifth issue of *Higher Education in Southeast Asia and Beyond* (HESB), we look at a range of salient themes from the leadership and management of higher education, to quality assurance.

Henri-Claude de Bettignies writes on the policy implications for developing the higher educational institutions and learning processes that are conducive for producing the leaders and entrepreneurs that society needs.

On quality assurance, **N. Varaprasad** and **Uma Natarajan** discuss the challenges of quality assurance in higher education in the context of massification, while **Wang Libing**, **Wesley Teter** and **Xu Bingna** share about what the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education – otherwise known as the Tokyo Convention – has done to harmonise different quality assurance systems and to facilitate mobility.

Turning to South Asia, **Jandhyala B. G. Tilak** writes on the dilemmas faced by India in the course of its reforms of higher education, while **Nida Dossa** writes about the innovative solutions used in Pakistan to widen access to higher education.

Meanwhile on China, **Ye Lin**, **Alfred M. Wu** and **Yang Xinhui** present their findings on the impact of higher education massification policies on different graduate groups.

On Southeast Asia, **Leang Un** and **Lars Boomsma** give a candid assessment of the World Bank's work on higher education in Cambodia. **Do Minh Ngoc** writes on Vietnam's efforts to "renovate" the higher education system since the *Doi Moi* policy began in 1986, while **Miguel Antonio Lim**, **Sylvie Lomer** and **Christopher Millora** examine the subsidy to cover tuition fees for Philippine students at all state universities and colleges, introduced by the Philippine authorities in 2017. Finally, **Takao Kamibeppu** and **Roger Y. Chao, Jr.** discuss Myanmar's higher education sector against the backdrop of the country's economic and democratic transition.

We trust that you will enjoy reading the articles in this issue, and we invite you to consider contributing to future issues, and be part of the conversations and debates on higher education in Southeast Asia and beyond.

THE EDITOR

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Developing Responsible Leaders and Entrepreneurs in Asia: Policy Implications

Henri-Claude de Bettignies

We all know that higher education is key to building the human capital needed to lead socio-economic development, and more so in a world that is experiencing globalisation, digitalisation, financialisation, environment deterioration, immigration issues and the acceleration of income disparity. In such a so-called VUCA world where volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity are so much in play, higher education is supposed to develop individuals who will take on leadership roles in the society, create added value by the enterprises they will start or join, and demonstrate responsible leadership skills in whatever position of power they will attain.

A key question for policy-makers then is how we are to develop the higher educational institutions and learning processes that are conducive, efficiently and effectively for the production of leaders and entrepreneurs that society needs. The enterprise – as a key value-creating institution in society by virtue of the products and services it puts on the market, the taxes it pays to the state, the jobs it creates, and the philanthropic contributions it makes – needs to be in the hands of responsible leaders who will care for their stakeholders and for future generations.

How can policy makers enhance the capacity of their national higher education systems to produce this type of leaders, who will possess the portfolio

of talents and range of skills needed to take action and contribute towards sustainable development?

To answer these questions, policy-makers need to have a sense of – and a scenario for – the world of tomorrow. Only then can policy-makers design, build and monitor a higher education system that produces the type – and the quantity – of educated citizens required to meet societal needs and creates, hopefully, a just society that leverages its human capital effectively.

First, I will start by identifying some trends likely to shape the world of tomorrow and the society in the near future. Then I will suggest ways upon which higher education can be designed to produce the leaders needed in such society. In conclusion, I will summarise the implications for policy makers through my proposal for developing responsible leaders and entrepreneurs.

LEADERS IN WHAT CONTEXT?

At a time when the benefits of globalisation are questioned; when the ubiquitous phenomenon of digitalisation transforms our interpersonal relations and our ways of life; when financialisation directs that the value of everything be measured in monetary terms –we realise that such changes do not bring a “revolution”, but a *change of civilisation*. Innovation, “impact innovation”, even if disruptive, becomes a categorical imperative.

In such context, we need to define the kind of society we would like to live in, and then design our education systems to prepare our children and future generations to live a happy life in such a society. Policy-makers, aware of the transformation of society, and having built a vision of tomorrow’s societal context that goes beyond merely visible economic growth, need to imagine how innovation can help higher education institutions to develop responsible leaders, through their production and sharing of knowledge.

We are already in a digitalised world where education will need to further leverage technology, but not be its slave. Even if online course offerings do enlarge and enrich access to knowledge and learning, policy-makers will still come to the realisation that technology cannot and will not replace the essential learning processes as acquired in the interpersonal teacher-student and student-student relationships.

The world in the near future will require us also to define education as a life-long learning process, involving flexibility and adaptability to an environment in constant and fast change. This will have implications for policy-makers, their bureaucracy and their administrative staff, whose frequent allergy to change will need to be addressed.

If the objective of higher education is to prepare professionals, senior administrators, leaders and entrepreneurs for a fast-changing and increasingly digitalised society, policy-makers will have much to gain from learning from experiments and experiences in other countries and regions of the world.

HOW CAN HIGHER EDUCATION PRODUCE THE RESPONSIBLE LEADERS OF TOMORROW?

With enlightened policy-makers having created the institutional context in which relevant and effective learning can take pace, the curriculum will have to be defined so as to induce the motivation towards lifelong learning, and cultivate curiosity and a sense of responsibility for one's own learning journey.

If the development of relevant skills adapted to the dynamics of each economy will obviously remain a core objective of the higher education process, the grooming of leaders will also require the cultivation of creativity and the capacity for independent judgment. This requires teachers to be familiar with a diversity of teaching methods and technologies, besides their knowledge of the subject matter to be taught – hence the importance of assessing upstream the training of teachers, PhD programmes, and performance

appraisals (and remuneration) of academic staff. In other words, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of Southeast Asia's higher education system requires a systemic approach that integrates the many interdependencies of a complex supply chain, from student selection, teachers' education, curriculum design, pedagogy, facilities upgrade, to human resource considerations for faculty (that relate to performance incentives, career pathways and lifelong learning).

A study of the higher education system in one Southeast Asian country shows how the vicious circle can manifest itself: low remuneration for academic staff, thus making the higher education teaching profession less attractive, in turn prompting those who do enter the profession to moonlight, leaving little time or energies for research. All this also results in limited or no incentive for the production of original – and culturally relevant – teaching material, which explains why the levels of their students' motivation are often modest.

So far, developed countries have demonstrated only a limited capacity to produce societies where social justice and the quality of life have been achieved. This naturally brings into question the merits of cloning their achievements. Bill Emmott, the former editor-in-chief of *The Economist*, wrote in his recent book *The Fate of the West* that the West is often seen as being “demoralised, decadent, deflating, demographically challenged, divided, disintegrating, dysfunctional, declining.” The dominant Western model is indeed challenged; the Eastern European communist alternative does not elicit enthusiasm, and yet other alternatives types of society (China's, for instance) are seen as a “laboratory” rather than a model to be emulated.

Around the world, we can see that artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning are game-changing technologies that have the potential to bring enormous benefit to society and enable citizens to tackle many of the world's greatest challenges. With the right incentives, protections and leadership, AI

and machine learning have the potential to alleviate suffering, by accelerating innovation across sectors such as climate change, poverty, criminal justice, governance, public health and, of course, education. But those technologies and the innovation they produce will still not be *the* answer to the complex issues facing education policy makers.

A PROPOSAL FOR DEVELOPING RESPONSIBLE LEADERS AND ENTREPRENEURS

Developing responsible leaders in Asia will indeed remain a challenge for policy-makers. Because national higher education budgets often do not match the needs, choices have to be made between priorities and long-term vision to optimise the use of limited resources.

To develop the critical asset of responsible leaders and entrepreneurs that countries need for their optimal socio-economic performance, governments and policy makers will need: a) an enhanced *awareness* of what is coming in their society; b) to articulate their *vision* for their societies of the type of men and women as output of the higher education system; c) to cultivate *imagination* to find appropriate, contingent, culturally adapted education curricula and technologies, in order to clearly define priorities to allocate resources d) to demonstrate *responsibility* in policies implementation. This road to *action* is fraught with difficulties.

To grow responsible leaders, I suggest developing an ecosystem which will also rely in particular on effective university-industry cooperation, to foster a mutually rewarding interdependence. This would give industry and services well-trained graduates, and potentially give universities the contribution of practitioners towards teaching, and perhaps also funding for relevant research projects that would be useful to the society beyond enterprises. If incentives and mentorship can be developed to encourage faculty members to pursue research with greater social impact and encourage publications – including publications in journals for practitioners – we could

see the progressive development of an education process that is more rooted in the respective country’s socio-economic realities.

Yet I do not want to underestimate the great value of the disciplines of the liberal arts, which have the propensity to cultivate one’s ability to explore imagination and the capacity for emotional intelligence. Encouraging pluri-disciplinary work and teaching, indigenous research (which is not cloning the West), and the creation of culturally relevant teaching materials are paths that will produce significant results, over time.

The development of exchanges among countries – as Europe has done through the Erasmus project – would probably produce also in Asia excellent results.

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Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the Age of Massification

N. Varaprasad and Uma Natarajan

Over the past two decades, there has been a rapid increase in the gross enrolment ratios (GERs) in higher education globally – and notably over the last decade in Southeast Asia – as higher education systems continue to expand and massify. These developments have been predicated on the policy perception that higher GERs at the tertiary level are likely to bring good returns to both the individual and the country. Higher education is valued by government and employers for the economic upshift and civic engagement it brings. Critical thinking, problem solving, working in diverse teams, ethical reasoning, communication —these qualities nurture both good individuals as well as good citizens.

While governments have been allocating more public money for the development of their nations' human capital, in the case of higher education, there has also been a significant growth in the private sector. Quality assurance in higher education attempts to ensure that the quality of the teaching and learning outcomes are not compromised by this rapid expansion in both the public and private sectors.

Quality in higher education is seen as a “multi-dimensional, multilevel, and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model, to the institutional mission and objectives, as well as to specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline,” as author

Adina-Petruța Pavel put it.¹ As the race for the global university rankings began in earnest in the last decade, universities globally – and particularly those in Asia – are strategising and discussing the ways and mechanisms in which to develop highly ranked universities in their respective countries. While the massification of higher education institutions (HEIs) is happening at an exponential rate in many developing nations, disparities in outcomes and achievements are also widening within systems.

This is essentially a challenge that many countries have begun to realise: How does one maintain quality while massifying higher education systems?

Best practices worldwide demonstrate that the establishment of effective quality assurance (QA) systems safeguards the maintenance of quality throughout the expansion process. The QA systems guarantee a certain threshold level of quality between and among institutions and can reinforce rigorous accountability measures in terms of achieving the desired and deliverable learning outcomes in higher education.

WHY QUALITY ASSURANCE?

Fundamentally, HEIs pursue quality for a myriad of reasons. There is a need among them to remain competitive to attract the best students and staff. Edward Sallis has defined four quality imperatives that drive institutions in the pursuit for quality – moral, professional, competitive and accountability. Professionalism is about putting the students' needs first by emphasising the best teaching and learning practices. Accountability can be achieved by objectively evaluating and measuring educational outcomes and is based on formative and summative instruments. The goal of measuring quality is vital, since it is through measurement that one can assess the effectiveness of processes and practices, which

¹ Pavel, A.-P. (2012). 'The Importance of Quality in Higher Education in an Increasingly Knowledge-Driven Society.' *International Journal of Academic Research in Accounting, Finance and Management Sciences*, vol. 2, Special Issue 1 (2012): p. 124.

The Tokyo Convention on Recognition — A New Era of International Higher Education in Asia-Pacific

Wang Libing, Wesley Teter and Xu Bingna

Last year, UNESCO staff identified a master's candidate studying at a major research university in Thailand. What made this special was that despite being a master's candidate in human rights the student did not have a bachelor's degree or prior formal qualification. Coming from a former conflict zone in the global south, the student had vast experience as an NGO manager, but no regular access to formal schooling. Given the student's professional experience and an assessment of prior learning, the university was still able to offer enrolment as a degree-seeking master's candidate on a full scholarship.

This type of flexible learning pathway demonstrates an innovative example where a university in the Asia-Pacific region was able to admit and fully fund an international student from a least-developed country. This was possible based on effective strategies for assessing and recognizing prior experience, even if the knowledge, skills and competences were gained outside a formal education system.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) and UNESCO's recognition conventions are powerful tools that embody these same principles as part of a vision to build a stronger global community.

REGIONAL TRENDS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM UNESCO BANGKOK

As the only United Nations agency with a mandate in higher education, UNESCO is well positioned to promote high-quality and inclusive lifelong learning opportunities for all. Legally binding conventions, such as the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (also known as the Tokyo Convention) reflect a common understanding of, and joint commitment to, the principles and international norms that have been developed and agreed upon by UNESCO Member States in the Asia-Pacific region.

In terms of both inbound and outbound mobility of international students, the Asia-Pacific is the fastest-growing region in the world. Given the rise of diverse training providers, fair and transparent procedures for the recognition of qualifications are significant concerns for students, institutions and quality assurance providers. The internationalisation of higher education is linked with initiatives such as Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development by its contribution to the development of cross-cultural understanding and tolerance. Collectively, cross-national perspectives on global issues such as poverty, water, food security, the environment and climate action are essential in achieving the SDGs, in which internationalised higher education plays a pivotal role.

LINKING RECOGNITION WITH QUALITY ASSURANCE AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

The harmonisation of quality standards and mechanisms in higher education across the region is of fundamental importance. Many quality tools have been developed within the Asia-Pacific region to enhance mobility and employability. As a result, it is increasingly important to promote fair and transparent recognition of competencies and qualifications earned in higher education. The Tokyo Convention came into force on 1 February

2018 following the ratification by five countries — Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea, and later by the Holy See. All other countries in the Asia-Pacific region are eligible to join as State Parties.

The Tokyo Convention provides renewed opportunities for recognition authorities in the Asia-Pacific to harmonise mobility policies and practices to ensure all qualifications are treated ethically, including qualifications earned by refugees and other vulnerable populations. Efforts are underway to raise awareness and build capacity so that everyone can benefit from the Convention. Ratification by a given country requires a concerted effort among diverse stakeholders who understand the benefits of internationalization for their students, institutions and country.

THE TOKYO CONVENTION FACILITATES MOBILITY

Through an integrated and holistic approach, the Tokyo Convention on recognition enables authorities at institutional and systems levels to harmonise different quality assurance systems. The aim is to ensure that qualifications from different countries are more compatible and comparable based on a shared understanding of learning outcomes, including through the recognition of prior learning.

The Tokyo Convention serves two primary functions: One is national coordination of recognition authorities, which develop and maintain authoritative information on national higher education systems. The other is regional coordination and monitoring that aims to build a network of National Information Centres (NICs) and promote the visibility and implementation of the Tokyo Convention throughout the region.

The Seoul Statement that was agreed by more than 30 countries at the First Session of the Committee of the Tokyo Convention in October 2018 in Seoul, Republic of Korea noted that the Convention’s entry into force was part of a “new era for mobility and internationalisation of higher education in the

Asia-Pacific through qualifications recognition.” The new statement by the Asia-Pacific Regional Committee also recognises the importance of the forthcoming Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications as a platform for collaboration between world regions.

In a vast and diverse region with growing numbers of inbound and outbound international students, the Tokyo Convention on recognition in Asia-Pacific helps to facilitate the recognition of higher education qualifications based on common principles, increased information sharing and transparency, which demonstrates countries’ commitment to improve the mobility of students and academics. The Convention reflects important trends on the recognition of higher education qualifications, including flexible assessments based on learning outcomes, partial studies and qualifications earned through non-traditional modes of learning.

Collaboration with diverse stakeholders is necessary to raise awareness of the Convention’s benefits and to promote mobility and employability at national and regional levels. To foster an inclusive dialogue, UNESCO will lead and coordinate the Tokyo Convention’s Secretariat in support of the SDG4-Education 2030 agenda.

To explore opportunities for collaboration with UNESCO, please contact us anytime (eisd.bgk@unesco.org).

Dilemmas in Reforming Higher Education in India

Jandhyala B.G. Tilak

It is widely recognised that higher education is the key to individual prosperity, economic security, social progress and the enduring strength of democracy. Wide access, equity and diversity in higher education are regarded as essential if higher education is to effectively contribute to the development of societies in economic, social, political, cultural and technological spheres – both at national and global levels. Besides producing a huge set of externalities, as a public (or at least as a *quasi-public*) good, higher education is considered one of the most important instruments to break poverty-related constraints and other structural issues of deprivation and inequality by offering fast upward mobility on the occupational, economic and social ladder to everyone in society. The overall gains, or even narrowly defined economic pay-offs from equitable education, are generally found to outweigh the losses in efficiency, if any.

Higher education in India has expanded quickly in the post-Independence period – from an extremely small base consisting of 32 universities, 700 colleges and 0.4 million students at the inception of planning in the country in 1950–51, to more than 900 universities, 42,000 colleges and about 35 million students in 2017–18. There are also more than 1.4 million teachers in the system. In terms of the current size, the higher education system in India is the second largest in the world, next only to China; the United States system now ranks after India. These numbers have led to the observation that our higher education system is about to enter the phase of “massification” or mass higher education, though the gross enrolment ratio (GER) is only around 25 percent currently. (It is generally felt that a ratio of

40 percent or can qualifies a country as moving into the phase of massification).

The phenomenal expansion of higher education during the post-Independence period has contributed a lot to the socio-economic development of the country in several spheres. At the same time, it suffers from severe inadequacies, if not failures.

Realising that higher education is essential for the social and economic transformation of the nation, India, like many other developing and advanced societies, intends to reform higher education in a big way to widen access, improve equity, raise standards and excellence, and promote diversity in higher education. However, again like many other countries, India faces several kinds of dilemmas in reforming and rejuvenating its higher education system. Often, choices have to be made between expansion and excellence, and between equity and excellence, as the strategies that promote each might be mutually conflicting. For example, plans for the massive expansion of higher education are accompanied by limited budgetary allocations. Similarly, intentions to promote participation of the disadvantaged strata of society are accompanied by expansion of full-cost-recovering and profit-seeking private institutions, rather than subsidised public higher education. It is somehow presumed that private institutions will improve equity, access and quality in higher education. The strategies adopted include a basket of measures, prominent among them being the promotion of the private sector, increased reliance on cost-recovery measures such as student fees and student loans, and internationalisation of higher education.

Globalisation, along with liberalisation, marketisation and privatisation, has added new dimensions to the reforms, necessitating that the higher education system be responsive, *inter alia*, to the changing national and global circumstances, and to the state and society on the one hand, and markets on the other, simultaneously. Globalisation and internationalisation has also hastened the spread of new values and approaches into even those societies

vehemently opposed to market-oriented views on education. The Indian higher education system has not been able to withstand this strong global tide. Debates on whether higher education is a public good or not are also gaining momentum. The role of the state in higher education is under attack; public financing of higher education is discouraged and cost-recovery mechanisms have been introduced, the most important among them being student fees and student loans, besides enabling the rapid growth of private education. Today, the major dilemmas revolve around three areas: how to choose among the alternative methods of financing higher education, the role of the private sector *vis-à-vis* the state and the selection of appropriate modes of internationalisation. A system that has been predominantly funded by the state for centuries faces the task of generating resources from several non-conventional, non-state sources. The role of the state in not only funding higher education, but also in the overall development of higher education is being questioned, as the private sector tends to grow at an alarming rate. How do we internationalise the higher education system while protecting and promoting our national values and concerns at the same time? At a fundamental level, the higher education system has to address the issue of the elusive triangle of quantity, equity and quality, and ensure a delicate balance between these.

Faced with the dilemma of setting up a few world class universities as against investing in the advancement of quality in the system as a whole, the government initiated a few reforms – recognising a handful “institutions of eminence” and liberally supporting them by granting them a high degree of autonomy and liberal public funding, with the hope that some of them may turn out to be world-class universities. Based on rankings under the National Institute Ranking Framework (NIRF) and the scores received from the accreditation agency (National Assessment and Accreditation Council), a few institutions are also granted a high degree of autonomy under the graded autonomy policy that was recently introduced. A few selected institutions are also allowed to recruit foreign faculty on temporary basis to address the

questions of faculty shortage on the one hand, and deteriorating quality in higher education. Accreditation of higher education institutions has been made mandatory and new accreditation mechanisms are being thought of. Is the system too much regulated? To improve governance of higher education system, proposals to replace the existing regulating bodies like the University Grants Commission (UGC) are under serious consideration. But the system is also so large and diverse that all the existing institutions cannot be done away with. The dilemma here is to restructure UGC or replace it with some other body; and replace or restructure only UGC or all the regulating bodies in higher education.

Many of such dilemmas are not only educational in nature, but are also social, economic and political, requiring a broader and holistic vision and long-term policy for the development of the nation and its higher education system.



University Enrolment Expansion and Returns to Higher Education: Evidence from China

Ye Lin, Alfred M. Wu and Yang Xinhui

Many countries around the world commit themselves to providing their citizens with equal access to educational opportunities and an even distribution of education resources through different policies and measures. The policy initiated by China in the 1990s to expand college and university enrolment

was intended to enable more citizens to gain access to higher education opportunities.

However, the development of higher education accompanied with an expansion policy also comes with potential issues such as increasing employment pressures, decreasing income levels and unpredicted satisfaction. Based on data from the China Labour-Force Dynamics Survey (or CLDS, launched by Sun Yat-Sen University), we analyse the impact of higher education massification policies on different graduate groups.

THE CHANGING INCOME GAP BETWEEN UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE, POLYTECHNIC AND VOCATIONAL SCHOOL GRADUATES

We observed that over the past two decades, the increase of salary-incomes of university and college graduates has been slower than those of polytechnic school, vocational high school, and technical school graduates, and the income satisfaction for the former is decreasing.

Before China's massification policy took effect, the income gap between university/college graduates and polytechnic and vocational school graduates was substantial. When comparing the incomes of different graduate groups before the massification policy, incomes of graduates were significantly positively affected by their educational attainments. This also reveals that the income gap would increase when workers reach senior positions. As the higher education system is rather new in China compared with developed economies, the returns to higher education, especially under the elite-oriented system, are quite substantial.

With the massification policy implemented, returns to higher education have declined as compared with other income groups. The gap in salaries between university/college graduates and those of polytechnic and vocational school graduates, has been narrowing since The incomes of university graduates enrolled

before 1999 when the massification policy was initiated were significantly higher than those of polytechnic and vocational school graduates of the same year; yet after 1999, the income gap has been shrinking. After 1999, though the incomes of college graduates were still higher than that of polytechnic and vocational school graduates of the same age, the difference was not substantial. It can be concluded that university and college graduates are facing a crisis of "diploma depreciation" to a certain extent.

INCOME SATISFACTION

More importantly, the massification policy has had a significant impact on income satisfaction. The income satisfaction of university/college and polytechnic graduates after massification has been decreasing, which indicates the complex influence of the massification policy over the income satisfaction of polytechnic graduates. Intriguingly, the income satisfaction of vocational school graduates enrolled after 1999 has been increasing, which may indicate a good match between vocational school graduates and the jobs they acquire. The income satisfaction of university graduates, college graduates and polytechnic graduates have all been decreasing over the years, so it appears that college graduates have suffered more.

A caveat is in order. Massification is not the only factor influencing the income satisfaction of graduates; working environment, work content and so on may also exert an impact on income satisfaction.

IMPACT ON JOB COMPETITIVENESS

The findings of our research show that the massification policy has had an impact on the job competitiveness of higher education graduates, which is caused by many factors. For example, the massification of higher education has reduced the admission standards of universities and colleges; therefore, the average quality of graduates is decreasing, and the average income growth rate of university/college graduates is slower than that of polytechnic, vocational school

graduates. Another explanation is the changes in the labour market and employment structure. In the early 21st century, with the rapid development of China's manufacturing industry, a large number of blue-collar workers were needed, most of whom graduated from polytechnic or vocational schools. In the meantime, the higher education sector expanded rapidly, and a large number of university/college graduates were produced by higher education, who found no corresponding positions. The imbalanced supply and demand in the market led to the salary decrease of university and college graduates, and their satisfaction with income dropped.

The massification policy aimed to increase university accessibility for citizens and promote an equal distribution of educational opportunities. However, the rapid expansion of higher education has affected the incomes and job satisfaction of university/college graduates to different degrees. In reality, the policy related to distributional equality aims to pursue quality in the first place instead of quantity; nonetheless, the Chinese higher education is moving towards pursuing quantity in university graduates. Therefore, the result of the massification policy is "low-level equality" rather than distributional equity and harmonious socio-economic development.

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

As far as government policy is concerned, it is suggested that while expanding the accessibility to higher education and providing equal educational opportunities, the government should guide higher education to be more targeted, professional and career oriented, strengthen vocational skill training, and increase the employment competitiveness of university/college graduates, so that educational resources can be fairly distributed and social equality realised. Besides, it is suggested that the government improve its employment policy and career services for university/college graduates. In line with the current strategy to increase employment opportunities, the government should, while improving the employment of university/college graduates, use policy tools to strike a balance between supply and demand in the

labour market, and achieve good allocation of human resources overall. Moreover, the government could establish a long-term employment statistics system, so that employment data and information collected can help higher education decision-makers to make informed decisions.

As far as higher education institutions are concerned, while teaching the required courses of their students' own majors, colleges and universities should widen the sphere of knowledge of their students and establish curricula according to the market demand. By doing so, the general quality of their students can be improved, and the flexibility and adaptability of students may be strengthened to better adjust to market changes. It is also suggested that universities and colleges provide their students with more channels for internships, which can better cultivate students' capability to be more market-oriented. Universities and colleges should establish more applied learning curricula to improve the hands-on capabilities of their students. Moreover, university-enterprise collaboration should be explored and enhanced, so that universities and colleges can better grasp the needs of enterprises for talents and professionals. At the same time, given the existing conditions, universities and colleges should provide as many opportunities for their students with more internships and in-house training, so that they can understand and experience different cultures of workplaces, and appreciate the needs of enterprises for different professionals. By doing so, the concept of "the massification of higher education" (*gaoxiao kuozhao*) can move towards "improving the quality of education" (*jiaoyu tizhi*), and, while strengthening all-round quality-oriented education, colleges and universities should educate and provide graduates both professional and practical skills needed for the burgeoning market economy.

Although the massification policy will bring more students into higher education, students from poor families may still be excluded. This is the case in China. Declining returns to education and the dissatisfaction with higher education may hinder personal motivation to pursue higher education. In particular, it will drive out students from poor family

backgrounds as they need to carefully compare returns to higher education with investments. An unbridled development of higher education will lead to worsened equity and equality over the long run. Therefore, the government and higher education institutions should attend to the negative impact of the massification policy.

This article is an abridgement of the full paper of the same title by the same authors, published in A. M. Wu and J. N. Hawkins (eds.) (2018), "Massification of Higher Education in Asia," Higher Education in Asia: Quality, Excellence and Governance (Singapore: Springer).

Innovation Needed to Widen Access to Higher Education

Nida Dossa

Pakistan's education sector is a dynamic one both in terms of scale and diversity. The constitution of the country makes provision for free education for all to ensure that there is opportunity, equity and social justice for every citizen. However, despite efforts by the government, foreign aid projects and civil society, universal access to high quality education remains an ambitious aspiration.

The challenge of access is huge in a country where 64% of the population are under 30 and the education expenditure is less than 3% of GDP. The number of out-of-school children remains high at around 24 million, of which 55% are girls. The situation is slightly better when it comes to tertiary education. However, there is much that still needs to be done.

In addition to the lack of resources and budget allocation to education, issues like discrimination, access to schools, missing facilities and teacher absenteeism also contribute to low enrolment and high dropout rates.

For the students who do manage to attain 12 years of education, accessing higher education opportunities is an even bigger challenge. This is particularly true for girls and even more so for girls from rural areas or regions where, for conservative cultural reasons, women are actively discouraged from pursuing education. Also, the lack of both flexibility and positive role models for women perpetuate stereotypes and further impede access.

There is also a clear class demarcation within Pakistani society. This reflects on the opportunities available to young people from various social classes and has significant implications for the quality of education that is accessible, if education is accessible at all. Since public provision of primary and secondary education is neither adequate nor of acceptable quality, there has been a dramatic increase in private provision priced in various ranges. What you choose is largely dependent on how much you can afford to pay.

Someone who cannot afford to pay for high quality private schooling has the option of public schools which come with their own host of problems, ranging from missing basic facilities like furniture and restrooms to entire ghost schools. Private provision is further classified in tiers of schooling available to low-, middle- and high-income classes. The quality provided is also proportional to the tuition paid.

Consequently, poor quality primary and secondary education recipients often also lose out on the limited merit-based admissions and scholarships in the higher education sphere, when competing with students who have had the opportunity to study at high-tier schools. This cycle perpetuates the class divide, resulting in loss of access and opportunities for all.

In addition, access issues are also exacerbated by the urban-rural divide as well as issues around existing

infrastructure for degree colleges and universities. Currently, less than 10% of students have access to higher education. This number has increased over the past decade and so has the number of universities. But the number and profile of students in universities is still limited and there is tremendous scope for innovative solutions.

DISTANCE LEARNING

There has, however, been some effort to improve access through online and distance learning education.

One example is of the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU). Established in 1974, it is the oldest provider of distance learning programmes in the country and the second-oldest in the world. Improving access for non-traditional students, including mature students, working professionals and females with limited mobility, AIOU provides low-cost degree programmes, making higher education accessible for people from a variety of backgrounds, including lower, middle and poor classes.

The university offers more than 2,000 courses delivered mainly through broadcasted lessons, with more than 1,000 study centres across the country. The enrolment is 1.2 million students per year, 58% being from rural areas, improving access in some of the hardest to reach areas.

Another example of open and distance learning provision in the country is the recently established Virtual University of Pakistan, which differs from AIOU in its use of technology.

Like the AIOU, the Virtual University also offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes entirely through distance learning. However, it integrates technology, a comprehensive online and physical assessment and learning management system, with remote campuses across the country equipped with internet connectivity. In the spirit of inclusion a zero semester is also offered to students who do not meet the minimum admission criteria.

WOMEN-ONLY UNIVERSITIES

There have also been attempts to widen participation through the provision of women-only universities, starting with the Fatima Jinnah Women University in Rawalpindi which supports access for women who would not have been allowed to study in a co-educational environment by conservative parents. There are now over a dozen women-only universities across the country.

Another example is the Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development, where provision is made not only for the women enrolled but also their families (often their children) to be housed in hostels and supported, including care facilities. This allows mothers who would not otherwise have had the opportunity, to study. Similarly, many elite universities now include outreach activities in smaller towns and villages and offer scholarships to talented students.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND PRIVATE PROVISION

The higher education sector has grown rapidly since the inception of the Higher Education Commission (HEC). Created in 2002, the HEC has worked extensively to not only improve access but also quality, drawing upon indigenous and international best practices and models. Since its inception, the commission has provided numerous local and foreign scholarships to students, thus playing a significant role in enabling young people to go to universities.

One of the major impediments to access is the rising cost of higher education. Scholarships and fellowships support students who otherwise would not have been able to pursue their education and drop out.

The HEC has been disbursing a number of scholarships to overcome this challenge, including needs-based scholarships and scholarships funded by development agencies as well as central government. Additionally, various universities also offer their own scholarships and bursaries.

In addition to the superficial treatment of local specificities that could have had a major impact on the HEQCIP's successful implementation, the author noted an even more troublesome trend: when problems arose during the implementation of the project, these problems were almost without exception attributed to failures on the Cambodian side.

That the project design or its premises could be flawed themselves did not enter the equation in the HEQCIP policy documents and evaluation. Towards the end of the HEQCIP project, WB mobilised a team to design a new project called "Higher Education Improvement Project (2018–2023)". Though the outcomes of the HEIP 2018-2023 remain to be seen, the way the project is designed is not all that much different from the HEQCIP, demonstrating the same lack of context specific details for failure and successful project strategic implementation.¹

THE DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE OF THE WORLD BANK

On a conceptual level, one could question the validity of the premises of WB's development discourse in general.

A 2017 independent evaluation of its own performance (titled "Higher Education for Development: An Evaluation of the World Bank Group's Support") is indicative of WB's understanding of "development". The overview of the report says that the evaluation is meant to "enhance understanding of the design of the World Bank Group support for higher education and its contribution to development," without further specifying what it understands "development" to be.

Under the section on "Higher Education Context", the report eventually does define what it holds to be "context", but its understanding of the concept is disappointing. It says that "specialists often identify three distinct but interrelated missions [of higher education]: (i) teaching and learning; (ii)

research; and (iii) community engagement." It is telling how this evaluation document subsequently discusses "community engagement": "Higher education can serve as a 'development pole' that engages with the community *to improve productivity*" (emphasis added). WB thus understands "community engagement" primarily in economic terms, demonstrating a thin understanding of "context" and what "development" might be.

Yet, it is not only WB that has difficulty in taking the local context seriously. Many international development agencies continue to operate within narrow definitions of human, social, and educational development that ignore the irreducible idiosyncrasies of local context as well. Though the racist notion of "educability" of the indigenous population that existed in colonial times is fortunately no longer with us today, the ahistorical and acontextual notion of "equivalency" continues to underpin much of international education development literature on "best practice," which some of our partner institutions and indeed our own colleagues assist in spreading around the globe.²

CONTEXTUALISING DEVELOPMENT

We would like to emphasise that our critical stance towards the current higher education development discourse of WB by no means implies that we think that economic prosperity should not be one of the outcomes of higher education. A flourishing higher education sector is one in which students receive a quality education with which they are well-equipped to realise their personal and professional ambitions including economic well-being.

We believe, however, that the role of higher education within society is far greater than simply churning out qualified graduates for economic gain. Rather than defining the "what for" of a university education within ever more fine-tuned parameters and key performance indicators predetermined by economic

1 For further information, see the project appraisal document of the HEQCIP and HEIP.

2 Keita Takayama, "Beyond Comforting Histories: The Colonial/Imperial Entanglements of the International Institute, Paul Monroe, and Isaac L. Kandel at Teachers College, Columbia University," *Comparative Education Review* 62, no. 4 (November 2018): 459–481.

calculus, we would like to stress the university's central importance as a place for personal growth, creativity and freedom. Instead of just enabling students to realise their ambitions, the university should also proactively help define what meaningful ambitions could look like.

Especially in a country like Cambodia, where there is barely a public sphere to speak of, it is of paramount importance to think of higher education as a part of an intricate texture of changing socio-economic circumstances and cultural horizons.



Competitive Strategies of Vietnamese Higher Educational Institutions

Do Minh Ngoc

In an unrelenting effort to renovate the educational system, the Vietnamese government has embarked on a Higher Education Reform Agenda (or HERA) for the period 2006–2020, which grants institutional autonomy to universities and colleges, allowing them to decide their own size and finances. While the Agenda is nearing its end and tertiary institutions have completed a pilot project from 2014 to 2017 as part of HERA, it is time for Vietnamese higher education institutions to start reflecting on strategies to prepare for necessary changes moving forward, ensuring their sustainable development and existence.

THE REVOLUTIONARY AGENDA

Since the *Doi Moi* (Renovation) policy of 1986, the Vietnamese higher education system has gone through groundbreaking changes, including eliminating the monopolistic control on education by the state, and the permission to open private universities and colleges. However, academic institutions are still subjected to centralised planning and financially reliant on government funding. Understanding that a transformation was inevitable in order to improve the quality and relevance of its higher education institutions in a market-driven economy, the Vietnamese government approved HERA (known as Resolution 14/2005/NQ-CP) in 2005. One of the key elements of HERA is allowing universities to decide on student quotas and program content and to manage their own budgeting activities. In general, HERA has been well accepted by the public and by the universities themselves, and is expected to completely renovate the tertiary education system. So far, as a result of HERA, all institutions in the country have been granted independence and the quality of research and teaching staff has improved. Although the government still partially finances their operations, the autonomy of tertiary institutions continues to be the ultimate goal, as confirmed by the deputy prime minister at a recent conference reviewing the pilot project for the period 2014–2017. Ultimately, universities and colleges will not be any different from independent enterprises, and thus, this article adopts a strategic management perspective to analyse their common strategies. Generally, universities serve mainly domestic students and their strategies at both corporate and business levels aim to facilitate growth and expansion.

CORPORATE LEVEL STRATEGY

Many institutions have been implementing a strategy of cooperation at the corporate level by developing joint academic programmes with foreign counterparts. This is a result of the 1987 government policy to

leverage international collaboration in order to diversify the financial resources of the education system. The first such alliance was made in 1998 and the number of international joint programmes has increased ever since. Joint programmes options range from diplomas to undergraduate and graduate degrees, and to PhD degrees. Students enrolled in these programmes pay very high fees, get access to foreign curricula, receive degrees from foreign institutions, and can choose to spend half of the program in Vietnam and the other half abroad. International joint programmes generate significant income for the institutions, help improve academic quality, enhance reputation, and attract more students through an improved offer of programmes.

BUSINESS-LEVEL STRATEGIES

The *market penetration* approach intends to increase sales of current services on the current market, which means recruiting more students to existing courses. Vietnamese universities and colleges have increased their student quotas throughout the years. From 1999 to 2013, the total enrolment in tertiary education has increased, stimulated by government policy with the aim to provide adequate human resources for the labor market. Despite that, the alignment between skills and market needs has not been addressed systematically.

Market development involves introducing a current service to a new market, which here means expanding the offer of existing courses to new groups of students. Vietnamese academic institutions have developed courses in English for domestic students and are admitting foreign students to these courses to study side by side with their domestic peers. Attracting international students has been an explicit government policy, with initiatives such as adopting an expensive scheme in 2008 to offer undergraduate courses in English and bring high-profile professors to Vietnam, or, more recently, allowing universities to decide on their own admission requirements for foreign students. Nevertheless, the lack of diversity of the course offer in English and relative low quality are major obstacles to recruiting international students and scholars.

Product development entails offering new services to the current market, which here means developing new courses for domestic students. This is the most prominent strategic move made by Vietnamese universities and colleges. Higher educational institutions in Vietnam are either mono- or multidisciplinary, and the number of multidisciplinary universities has reportedly increased. New courses are offered in increasing numbers and options in order to reach more students. This most clearly reflects the nature of Vietnamese universities and colleges as teaching institutions relying on tuition fees as their main source of income.

Product diversification means moving into new market segments with new services. Here, the approach involves attending to new groups of learners. Many universities offer training for adults (on languages, computer skills, practical skills, etc.) At the same time, some institutions diversify to reach earlier stages, or different segments, of education. Hanoi National University of Education is comprised of the High School for Gifted Students, Nguyen Tat Thanh School (middle and high school), and Bup Sen Xanh Kindergarten. Hoa Sen University recently launched the Foreign Language & Overseas Studies Center, which serves both adults and younger learners (primary, elementary, and high school students), providing English courses and consultancy on overseas studies.

STRUGGLING TO BECOME FULL-FLEDGED

So far, the strategies of Vietnamese academic enterprises have been largely oriented by government plans, and their moves have been mostly responsive rather than proactive. Being part of a centralised system for so long, universities and colleges are not equipped with adequate management capabilities to meet the demands of the labor market and align themselves with international standards. Should total autonomy be granted, Vietnamese higher educational institutions would fare no better than baby birds falling from the nest—the safe haven where the state used to provide all the solutions; some may fall hard, others will learn and soar. Until then, the government should continue addressing the

system’s shortcomings to better facilitate the course to independence of Vietnamese tertiary education.

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Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education in the Philippines

Miguel Antonio Lim, Sylvie Lomer, and Christopher Millora

There is increasing attention worldwide on the debate regarding who pays university tuition fees. In contrast to other governments, the Philippine authorities have recently introduced a subsidy to cover tuition fees for Philippine students at all State Universities and Colleges (SUCs). This Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act was signed into law on August 3, 2017. It commits to “provide adequate funding... to increase the participation rate among all socioeconomic classes in tertiary education.” The subsidy applies to first undergraduate degrees in all tertiary education institutions. The Act also increases income-contingent loans available to the poorest.

There is a concern that the policy will lead to an exodus of students from private to public providers. As a result of a constitutional commitment to maintaining both public and private institutions, the Act allows for a subsidy toward fees at private institutions at a rate equivalent to their nearest SUC. Students can also benefit from support for books, supplies, transportation, accommodation, and other related expenses. The Act counters a

longstanding trend of increasing fees in higher education. Philippine Senator Benjamin Aquino IV, the Act’s key supporter, suggested that the provision of free tuition would “unlock the door to a brighter future,” thus “empower(ing) more Filipinos with the promise of a college diploma.” This resounded strongly among Filipinos, who value higher education qualifications.

The government’s allocation to higher education has recently seen significant increases, doubling from US\$484.47 million in 2010 to approximately US\$1 billion in 2016, although spending per capita remains relatively low. The Philippine constitution demands that education receive the largest share of the national budget, and national authorities have allocated US\$793 million (1 percent of the budget) to introduce the subsidy in 2018. The national economy is projected to expand at over 6 percent in the medium term and the subsidy appears affordable. However, while the measure is politically popular, it has been fiercely debated.

SUPPORT AND OPPOSITION

The Act aims principally to address dropout rates: only a quarter of students in higher education graduate at present. The Act is meant to help those dropping out because of a financial shortfall. This support would not primarily redistribute resources, but rather assist those who face difficulties in the last phase of their studies. The Act is also intended to enhance quality. Tertiary institutions in the Philippines are governed by the Commission for Higher Education Development (CHED), which monitors, evaluates, and manages quality assurance and enhancement. The Act originally included an enrolment cap for every SUC, which could only be increased if SUCs met increased quality standards set by the regulator. However, in the final version of the Act, there is no longer a cap; SUCs will be able to set student numbers themselves.

Stakeholders express three key criticisms. First, there are already a number of programmes in place to improve equitable access. SUCs are already subsidised by the government and tuition is significantly

cheaper than in the private sector. The system of “socialised tuition” also implies that students pay in proportion to their family income. Second, the Act disproportionately benefits the middle-to-upper classes, because the bulk of SUC students come from moderate to well-off backgrounds. Only 12 percent of SUC students belong to the first and second poorest deciles—while 17 percent come from the ninth and richest deciles. The Act is characterised as having an “unintended regressive impact.” The National Union of Students raise concerns that SUCs might raise other school fees to compensate for their lack of control over tuition fee income. These other fees are not automatically covered by the subsidy and could penalise the poorest students further (tuition fees comprise only between 20 to 30 percent of the total cost of a degree.) Third, reducing the cost of SUCs could lead to an exodus out of private and into public institutions. Of the 1,943 Philippine tertiary institutions, 88 percent are private and 12 percent are public. Approximately 54 percent of students are enrolled in private higher education and 46 percent in public. Given that enrolment is already on the increase in public higher education institutions, there is concern that this initiative could dramatically alter the sector. This comes in conjunction with the move to extend compulsory education from 11 to 13 years in the “K-to-12” programme. During the transition period, which ends in 2018, smaller cohorts have entered university as students have been kept for an additional year in secondary education. This has affected the finances of higher education institutions, placing particular pressure on private institutions. The exodus of students could also be mirrored by a migration of faculty, as salaries are often lower in private institutions, whereas SUCs pay a standardised government salary.

CONCLUSION

The Act’s potential effects go beyond economic efficiency and targeting specific economic groups. It sends a powerful signal, particularly to poor and struggling students, that higher education is accessible to all. The rhetoric of “life dreams” establishes a narrative of prosperity based on merit and work, in which higher education plays a critical role.

However, there are important questions about this initiative’s sustainability. In principle, the Act allows *all* Filipinos to access quality tertiary education and commits to “provide adequate funding,” potentially establishing universal access. The Philippines has a young and growing population: the number of 15–24 year olds has increased from 17.6 million in 2006 to 19.9 million in 2016. As the “K-to-12” transition period ends, more students will be entering higher education. Given the powerful hold of the higher education “dream” among Filipinos, we expect a large increase in entrants into higher education, which may not have been expected when preparing the Act’s budget. The absence of a cap on student numbers in the final version of the law confirms an intention to expand the sector, incentivising SUC leaders to raise revenue by increasing student numbers. This could exacerbate the projected flight of students and faculty from private to public institutions. Thanks to the expanding economy, the Act is affordable in the short-to-medium term. But concerns about a rapid expansion of student numbers call its long-term sustainability into question.

Can the Philippines afford *not* to introduce such a policy? For the country to compete with its regional rivals as a knowledge economy, expanding access to higher education would likely provide a competitive advantage. With its large service sector and rapid industrialisation, the Philippines is well equipped to take advantage of the skilled workforce provided by expanding enrolment in higher education.

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Higher Education and Myanmar's Economic and Democratic Development

Takao Kamibeppu and Roger Y. Chao, Jr.

With Myanmar's economic and democratic transition in rapid progress, the higher education sector needs to reengineer itself. The November 2015 elections gave its mandate to a National League for Democracy (NLD) government. Efforts have to be made to enact higher education and private education laws, incorporate citizenship education, and increase engagement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

EVOLVING EDUCATION LEGISLATION

After 50 years of isolation, neglect, and underinvestment, Myanmar's higher education infrastructure (e.g. buildings, libraries, and laboratories), curriculum, research, and teaching capacity require substantial renovation, investment, and capacity building. Of the 170 public higher education institutions, under 13 different ministries, that comprise Myanmar's higher education, almost half are situated in Yangon (33) and Mandalay (36), and only 10 universities can confer doctorate degrees. Furthermore, a significant number of these institutions actually offer vocational training or distance education, raising quality issues.

To address some of these issues, Myanmar's national education law was enacted in October 2014. It was amended in June 2015 to incorporate the demands of protestors (e.g. students and civil society organisations), which slowed progress in drafting its subsector laws for higher and private education. Key higher education issues addressed in

the law include the extent of university autonomy, the right to organise unions, and the university's right to formulate its own curriculum. Given the changing nature of higher education stakeholders, and the country's development needs, enacting and amending the national education law has been an evolving process characterised by inclusiveness, openness, and to a certain extent transparency, which are key features of a democratic government.

Transparency and good governance through a set of legal frameworks, and their implementation, help enhance the country's higher education reputation, especially with a clear higher education mandate including increased access, equity, quality, and relevance. Aside from economic considerations, however, Myanmar needs to consider its nation-building requirements and the contribution of higher education, through citizenship education, to ensure sustainable development and transition to democracy.

UNIVERSITY-LED INITIATIVES?

In spite of the uncertainty deriving from the absence of a higher education law, universities will be granted a degree of institutional autonomy, especially as they have been tasked to draft charters. Universities are under pressure to support the demands of a fast growing economy driven by local economic development and increasing direct foreign investment in the country's different sectors, including higher education.

Myanmar's higher education sector is now charged with the responsibility of producing enough graduates with the required skills, knowledge, and attitudes demanded by an economy increasingly connected to the global market. Universities need to reengineer themselves and their curriculum, to effectively conform to the requirements of Myanmar's fast changing economic and social environment. Within the proposed institutional autonomy framework, universities need human and financial resources along with much needed infrastructure, to effectively deliver globally skilled and competent human resources required by industry. Furthermore, quality standards need to be established through a national qualifications framework and an independent national

quality assurance agency aligned with ASEAN and international practices.

Myanmar’s universities, however, lack the capacity to undertake these changes, especially within an unfamiliar environment and a fairly new and vague institutional autonomy framework. Half a century of isolation and a constant lack of investment have taken their toll on the capacity of higher education institutions to adapt to regional and global standards and to the rapid changes of the country’s economic and social environment. Although the international development community has contributed with technical assistance, capacity building, and even infrastructure development, a truly national higher education sector needs to take into consideration its own traditions, context, and needs, rather than transplant foreign models.

In addition, Myanmar universities need to engage in citizenship education to support social development, by inculcating the rights and responsibilities required to be a Myanmar, ASEAN, and global citizen. Under the above context and development, “proactive learning,” which focuses on interactive and participatory learning led by faculty members, may provide an effective method to nurture citizenship and employability among students, and narrow the gap between the provision of higher education, the requirements of industry, and the country’s economic and social development needs.

USING ASEAN AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Myanmar needs to conform to the requirements of its membership in ASEAN, and utilize its advantages. Aside from increasing regional economic integration, ASEAN, through the ASEAN University Network and SEAMEO RIHED (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization/Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development), has taken a significant number of higher education initiatives that should help its member countries’ higher education systems reach regional and international

standards. These programs include establishing national qualifications frameworks, which will be referenced to the ASEAN Regional Qualifications Framework by 2018; setting up the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network; and developing an ASEAN Credit Transfer System.

These higher education developments at the regional level do not stand alone. Other bilateral and multilateral higher education engagements also provide support for capacity development, infrastructure improvement, and guidance in international best practices. However, ASEAN provides a significant and tested framework in line with its policy of narrowing the developmental gap between its member countries, a strong regional basis for higher education cooperation, and a directive to establish not only the ASEAN Economic Community, but also the ASEAN Community, in the near future.

Higher education can be key to supporting the country’s economic development and democratic transition. However, legal frameworks must be established and implemented, even if this remains an ongoing process. Support must be given to higher education institutions, especially within the proposed institutional autonomy framework, and universities need to be actively engaged in citizenship education to enhance nation building, reduce internal conflicts, and support the democratic transition. Finally, Myanmar’s active engagement in ASEAN higher education initiatives provides support for capacity building, quality enhancement, mutual recognition, and, in time, meeting ASEAN higher education standards. Transparency, inclusion, and good governance remain key factors to improving Myanmar’s higher education sector.

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The **Center for International Higher Education (CIHE)** at the Lynch School of Education, Boston College, promotes the belief that an international perspective is needed to foster enlightened policies and practices in higher education. With this mission, CIHE was founded in 1995 to advance knowledge about the complex realities of higher education in the contemporary world through its research, publications, training programmes, and advisory activities.

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The HEAD Foundation (THF) is a charitable organisation set up in 2013 in Singapore to contribute to the sustainable development of Asia. As a think tank, we focus on issues around:



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