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Internationalization, Regionalization, and Soft Power: China's Relations with ASEAN Member Countries in Higher Education

Abstract Since the late 1980s, there has been a resurgence of regionalism in world politics. Prospects for new alliances are opened up often on a regional basis. In East and Southeast Asia, regionalization is becoming evident in higher education, with both awareness and signs of a rising ASEAN+3 higher education community. The quest for regional influence in Southeast Asia, however, has not been immune from controversies. One fact has been China's growing soft power. As a systematically planned soft power policy, China is projecting soft power actively through higher education in the region. Yet, China-ASEAN relations in higher education have been little documented. Unlike the mainstay of the practices of internationalization in higher education that focuses overwhelmingly on educational exchange and collaboration with affluent Western countries, China's interactions with ASEAN member countries in higher education are fulfilled by "quiet achievers," mainly seen at the regional institutions in relatively less developed provinces such as Guangxi and Yunnan. This article selects regional higher education institutions in China's much disadvantaged provinces to depict a different picture to argue that regionalization could contribute substantially to internationalization, if a variety of factors are combined properly.

Keywords internationalization, regionalization, soft power, China, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Introduction

Resurgent regionalism in recent decades has created fresh challenges and prospects for new alliances (Hurrell, 1995; Jayasuriya, 2003). Some institutions such as the European Union, which is regarded by many as the most successful

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regional agreement, promote regionalism strongly. In East and Southeast Asia,¹ regionalization has now started to have an impact on higher education, with both awareness and signs of a rising ASEAN+3 higher education community. Since higher education is increasingly seen as a key pillar in constructing a knowledge economy, countries deploy their higher education resources to the greatest advantages to increase national competitiveness, enhance economic growth rates, and raise international prestige. Realizing the benefits inherent in regionalization, China has begun to take a role in strengthening regional organizations and to play a central role in energizing the region's economy (Vogel, 2010, March). The realm of higher education is one of its most systematically planned soft power policies (Yang, 2010). China's quest for regional influence in Southeast Asia, however, has not been immune from controversies. One factor is its rising soft power (Yoshimatsu, 2009).

With US foreign policy pivoting toward Asia (Editorial, 2011, November 16), China has adjusted its policy on Southeast Asia so as to work more closely with its Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) neighbors. According to the Director of International Exchange and Collaboration of the Yunnan Education Bureau, international students in Yunnan used to be mainly from Europe and North America until the early 1990s. In line with China's "safe development, strong neighbors" policy in the 1990s, Yunnan adjusted its focus to students from South and Southeast Asia, with the result that ASEAN student numbers have increased considerably (Gan & Li, 2003). Most recently, the policy shift has become more evident, as shown by remarks by China's Vice Premier Li Keqiang (2012) at the Boao Forum on 2 April 2012:

As a member of the Asian family.... China makes greater openness to Asia the strategic priority in its opening-up policy.... We are ready to work with relevant countries to improve such regional cooperation mechanisms as China-ASEAN cooperation.... to expand personnel exchanges, particularly youth and non-governmental exchanges, promote contacts and dialogues between different cultures and civilizations and enhance the friendship among peoples.... China is committed to the policy of building good-neighborliness and friendship and will be a good friend and good partner of Asian countries forever.

Nevertheless, China-ASEAN relations in higher education have been little documented. Unlike the mainstay practices of higher education

¹ East and Southeast Asia are defined here in geographical terms. The former consists of China, Japan, North and South Korea and Mongolia, while the latter comprises Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, and East Timor.

internationalization that focus overwhelmingly on educational exchange and collaboration with Western developed countries, interactions between China and ASEAN states are fulfilled by “quiet achievers,” mainly in China’s less developed southwestern region including Guangxi and Yunnan. This is due to the layered situation regarding internationalization in China and arguably globally, where attention and achievements concentrate on economically wealthy societies and top-tier institutions in the developing world (Welch & Yang, 2011). In contrast, most collaboration and exchange in higher education between China and ASEAN countries (except Singapore) is found in the provinces neighboring ASEAN countries (Welch, 2011a). This article chooses regional higher education institutions in China’s much disadvantaged provinces to depict a somewhat different picture of achievements in internationalization. It argues that regionalization could contribute substantially to internationalization, if a variety of factors were combined properly.

Regions, Regionalism, and Globalization

While there is debate as to the extent to which the nation state is still central, today’s world order is dominated by two phenomena: globalization and regionalism. Globalization here refers to “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens, 1990, p. 64). Against this backdrop, regional relations matter, with particular resonance in East and Southeast Asia, given these regions’ dynamic relations with China: a heady mix of cooperation and competition, including in higher education. Some hedging against China’s rise is evident, as illustrated in China’s border disputes with each immediate Southeast Asian neighbor (Zheng, 2010; In the balance, 2010, December 2). A newer challenge is evident in China’s cultural rise, exemplified in the growing number of Confucius Institutes that have been established throughout the region.

Regionalization, however, is an elusive concept. A region can be simply described as a group of countries located in the same geographically specified area (Mansfield & Milner, 1999). Regionalization takes different forms in different contexts, but generally refers to formal collaboration between two or more states. Contemporary regionalization emerged from the paradigm of economic liberalization and market deregulation, the revitalization of European integration, and the collapse of the Cold War. It was generally formed with the idea of increasing competitiveness of member countries towards the outside world as well as encouraging inter-regional interactions. Much contemporary interest is directed towards boosting competitiveness, including via regional

trading blocs. The development of both regional and global governance structures has given it increasing impetus (Shameel, 2003; Robertson, 2008). Regionalization and globalization are each part of an historical process of strengthening interdependence, and weakening the state's barriers to free trade. Regionalization has been seen as building on the existing foundations of globalization (Telò, 2007), but this depends on the way a region acts within the framework of the global system.

In higher education, globalization, internationalization, and regionalization are each used to describe contemporary changes.² Higher education institutions worldwide face increasingly similar issues that breach national borders, and require concerted regional efforts. The development of regional higher education in various world regions challenges national values and cultures. It calls for new regional instruments, which can promote mutual understanding, while helping boost economic and educational competitiveness in emerging knowledge economies. Internationalization and regional integration in higher education are complementary. When utilized appropriately, regional integration can sustain internationalization. Countries in a region can collaborate to enhance higher education quality and facilitate student mobility through mechanisms such as quality assurance, accreditation, credit transfer, and qualifications recognition.

While governance is increasingly multilevel, intricate and spatially dispersed, representation and identity remain stubbornly rooted in ethnic, regional and national communities. This creates conditions for area-specific forms of regionalism, as shown by the increasing integration of trade and education between China and ASEAN member countries. As China-ASEAN interactions promote regionalization, regional associations, governments and higher education institutions on both sides seek to extend opportunities for educational cooperation.

Regionalizing Higher Education in East and Southeast Asia

The past decade has seen increasing interdependence among East Asian countries, especially economic integration and policy collaboration. An East Asian dimension to internationalization is evident at regional, national, and institutional levels. For example, despite intermittently troubled relations, the number of Vietnamese students going to China to further their studies has been rising (Welch, 2010). Vietnam has strengthened its relations and collaboration with China and joined organizations concerned with higher education in the region. China is a popular destination for Vietnamese students (MOET, 2004), and offers

² Internationalization here refers broadly to interactive activities in cross-border educational exchange that aim at mutual understanding and collaboration (Yang, 2002).

large numbers of scholarships to Vietnamese students (MOET, 2008).

This trend assumes much greater importance in light of China's dramatic scientific rise, which presents major opportunities for regional synergies in higher education.³ China is currently ranked second after the USA in international indices of scientific output (Adams, King, & Ma, 2009; UNESCO, 2010; Simon & Cao, 2009; Yang & Welch, 2011). Thus ASEAN members and their higher education institutions now see China as an attractive partner, especially its top-tier universities. An example of China's wider strategy of strengthening itself through human capital, substantial investment in fostering a few elite research-intensive universities via national projects such as 211 and 985 has paid off, and offers great opportunities for extending cooperation with ASEAN.

Regional organizations are an expression of educational coordination. ASEAN was founded in August 1967, now has 10 members (with China as one of the associated 3). Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) membership increased from 12 in 1989 to 21 in 1997. Each organization includes elements devoted to higher education. The UNESCO Regional Bureau founded in 1961, builds networks and capacity in regional higher education, including promoting greater mobility and recognition of higher education qualifications, often in tandem with the Southeast Asian Ministers for Education Organization-Regional Institute for Higher Education (SEAMEO-RIHED). The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank each also play influential roles in coordinating regional approaches to higher education (Robertson, 2005; Jakobi, 2007).

Some non-regional international organizations are influential in Southeast Asia. *Education at a Glance*, published by the OECD annually, is an important source of educational indicators covering non-member Asian countries. While the OECD is yet to take an interest in China-ASEAN linkages, emphasizing shared international standards rather than national peculiarities of education has cleared the way for greater convergence and commitment amongst China and ASEAN. Its rating and ranking activities, scientifically researched by experts and presented in accessible manner, put some Asian states under pressure to import and apply models for education developed in other (usually developed) countries (Martens, 2007). UNESCO's Institute for Statistics, based in Montreal, Canada, performs a similar function.

Another form of regionalization of ASEAN-China higher education is through

³ Apart from Singapore, and to some extent Thailand and Malaysia, ASEAN's institutions of higher education are less evolved than those of China. Therefore, the prospect of equal relations, and hence ease of healthy synergies, is limited. There is a potential for dependency, although China handles this arguably better than the Western powers and Japan, and also it is less of a problem in relation to the lesser tier institutions in Southern China, as shown later in this article.

establishing associations within the Asia-Pacific. The Association of Pacific Rim Universities was established in 1997 as a consortium of major research universities in the Asia Pacific region. It has 42 member higher education institutions including the University of Malaya, the National University of Singapore, and eight from China (Welch, 2011b). The membership is based on four criteria: academic excellence, research intensity, global outlook, and innovative dimensions. Each of these initiatives includes important components that act as epistemic and, to a degree, cultural bridges between China and ASEAN.

The University Mobility in the Asia-Pacific was established in 1993 to boost cooperation among countries in the Asia Pacific through enhanced international understanding and increased university students and staff mobility. Its eligible countries and territories include Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam, as well as Chinese Taipei. Its Credit Transfer Scheme encourages credit exchange among member countries. Some universities from associate members have established academic agreements with their peers in its member countries. Such activities strengthen cooperation among higher education institutions in the region, in ways similar to the European ERASMUS credit scheme.⁴

Similar to the Association of International Educators in North America and the European Association of International Education in Europe, the Asia-Pacific Association for International Education was established in 2004 to advocate international education and extend its development. It promotes closer relations and exchanges among Asia Pacific universities. The Asia Pacific Quality Network, founded in light of the Brisbane Communiqué, includes Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, and China.

East and Southeast Asia share similarities and differences in regionalism. Creating a form of regionalism has been a difficult task in both regions. While only containing four member countries, Northeast Asia is a complex region. There are a variety of reasons for the difficulty to bind its countries together in a form of regional institution. According to Rozman (2004), constraining factors include the modernization that happened among them, the historical background which creates abhorrence between Japan and China, and a lack of willingness among the member countries to negotiate and cooperate between and among them. Nevertheless, Northeast Asia is now moving towards the creation of regionalism among its members, as evidenced by the willingness of China, Japan, and South Korea to join the ASEAN+3.

⁴ It is important to note the huge difference in scale. ERASMUS had 231,000 students in 2010. Higher education regionalization in ASEAN is still largely under-developed and faces enormous obstacles. Furthermore, regional cooperation in ASEAN members remains marginal to national politics, and their under-developed systems have limited capacity to financially support regional links.

Comparatively, Southeast Asia is a region of even more diverse peoples and cultures, of variable economic and political structures, and of uneven capacities and resources. Its diversity is often used as an excuse for many things, from the slow pace of democratization to the shallowness of economic integration. However, due to increasing common threats (e.g., environmental degradation, trans-boundary health problems), aspirations (e.g., rights, democracy), and needs (e.g., social development, economic growth), Southeast Asia has begun to build common agendas around these issues, which will be a big bold step towards defining a community. Presently, the process of creating an ASEAN Charter provides an opportunity for engaging ASEAN organizationally as civil society/social movements clarify what kind of regional alternatives will work for them (Chavez, 2006).

The ASEAN+3 Higher Education Community

Shared identities, values and meanings and multilateral institutions that guarantee reciprocal obligation are essential to form a regional community (Adler & Barnett, 1998). ASEAN members have become aware that the creation of a common higher education space is a critical step towards their greater regional integration objective, and more importantly, a link to economic growth. ASEAN has long explored regional collaboration in higher education (de Prado Yepes, 2007), initially among member states, now increasingly with Northeast Asia, notably China. It took ASEAN three decades to transcend irregular discussions and small pilot projects, and build a substantial role in regional higher education. From its meeting in Manila in 1975 and another one in 1977, it prioritized four “problem areas”: manpower development, teacher education and training, education systems, and special education. The 1992 summit reaffirmed ASEAN studies and an ASEAN University as priorities for education cooperation and also urged implementation of student exchanges at secondary and tertiary levels as a strategy for promoting ASEAN awareness. A key element was the ASEAN University Network which was established in 1995 as an inter-university cooperation network, with member from ten ASEAN countries. It was extended in 2001 to include research cooperation, co-hosted conferences and academic exchanges with some major Chinese universities, on agreed priority areas (ASEAN University Network, 2008; Welch, 2011a).

Based on the Agreement on Trade in Services signed by China and ASEAN in 2007 under the ASEAN-China Free Trade Zone, education services are a market item that can be “traded” trans-nationally within the region. Meanwhile, NGOs such as the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning (a consortium of major public universities from various Southeast Asian countries)

foster cooperation among member institutions, particularly through regional fellowships and academic exchange programs. The annual Asian University Presidents Forum, initially evolved from the Non-governmental Collaborative Association of Presidents of Chinese and Thai Institutions of Higher Learning at Srinakharinwirot University in 2002 and later including other Asian universities, serves as a platform for the presidents of the member institutions to discuss matters relating to the promotion of international academic collaborations as well as exchange of information and expertise. The Forum in 2003 was hosted by China's Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. Since then, it has been organized annually, hosted and chaired by member universities on a rotation basis. Similarly, Presidents' Forum of Southeast and South Asia and Taiwan Universities was set up to provide a venue for academics to share their valuable experiences to improve higher education and international cooperation in the region.

Higher Education as Soft Power

The term soft power was coined by Nye (1990; 2004) to denote the ability to influence what others do or shape what they want, by persuasion. Stemming from the attractiveness of a nation's culture, ideals and policies and resembling Edward Carr's (1954) "power over opinion" and Steven Lukes' (1974) "third dimension of power," it is usually defined as culture, education, and diplomacy, which provide the capacity to persuade other nations to willingly adopt the same goals. "Winning hearts and minds" comprises an important part of the international higher education equation. Educational exchange falls under the rubric of soft power, as does the spread of cultural institutes designed to foster language and cultural awareness abroad (Altbach, 2005, May). Connections between institutions of higher education are a steadying and civilizing influence.

Given a historical and cultural background in soft-power and regional leadership, and the intense competition with the West led by the US, China is working hard to project itself on the world stage via peaceful means such as culture and education. China's rich history includes centuries of projecting its culture within the region (Zhang, 2011), and of Chinese settlers moving to what is now Southeast Asia (Wang, 1999). Chinese culture and language is, once again, proving attractive in neighboring ASEAN states, despite some reservations about China's intentions: "China's soft power may be only natural in Southeast Asia, its nearest neighborhood" (Kurlantzick, 2006, p. 2). China intends to expand its global influence in the region, and promote educational exchange and collaboration. One effective policy strategy has been the combination of higher education with the appeal of Confucianism to offer Beijing a comparative

advantage in its soft power approach (Shambaugh, 2005). Chinese leaders are aware of the critical role of higher education in the projection of soft power, and have encouraged the dramatic expansion of Confucius Institutes in ASEAN members.

China-ASEAN Relations in Higher Education

China is becoming increasingly sophisticated in using soft power resources (Ziegler, 2007). A core part of its projection is to promote Chinese culture and language. Using arts of persuasion, China's deployment of its soft power has expanded the Western definition as well as extended its scope.⁵ Since 1990s, China's soft power gambit has been evident in neighboring Southeast Asia. China has strengthened its relations with ASEAN states in the fields of foreign aid, trade, finance, infrastructure, business, labor, environment, and development as well as tourism. Its soft power diplomacy is intricate and comprehensive, operating at various levels: establishing firm political and financial connections with Southeast Asian governments through development aid; exploring a comprehensive cooperative framework through FTA-plus development plans; enhancing cultural attractiveness and promoting pro-China understanding among ASEAN states by means of quasi-governmental projects; and expanding the influence of the private sector and its relations with Chinese overseas and local business networks in Southeast Asia.

China is projecting its educational services into ASEAN members. It offers programs either independently or in collaboration with local institutions in nearly all ASEAN countries. Both the quantity and quality of Mandarin Chinese or *Putonghua* use continue to increase. The number of students from ASEAN countries studying in China keeps rising. In 2010, there were 265,090 foreign students from 194 countries studying in China. The central government provided RMB 800 million (US\$121.7 million⁶) in scholarships to such students in 2010 and local governments offered about RMB 110 million in scholarships. These government scholarships benefited 22,390 international students in 2010, 22.7% more than in 2009. The overwhelming majority of the foreign students enrolled in Chinese schools came from Asia including Southeast Asia (Number of foreign students in China rise in 2010, 2011, March 4). Sites of cultural transmission, intercultural exchange, and Chinese learning, Confucius Institutes are spreading

⁵ The term of soft power is slippery. China's case further complicates its meaning. For the Chinese Communist government, soft power is not merely a tool for building international relations, its deployment is also critical domestically. In this way, China redefines the scope of the term.

⁶ The exchange rate was calculated as US\$1=6.573RMB.

China's soft power among its ASEAN neighbors: 12 in Thailand, seven in Indonesia, three in the Philippines, two in Malaysia, two in Myanmar, one in Singapore, one in Cambodia, and one in Laos.

However, China's strategies of projecting soft power through higher education have been little documented. Indeed, China-ASEAN relations in higher education are relatively under-researched in general (Welch, 2011a). In line with mainstream internationalization practices and research in higher education that focus overwhelmingly on educational exchange and collaboration with Western developed countries, there is a hierarchical pattern of internationalization between China and ASEAN members: while Singapore's relations with China are strongest, with dozens of partnerships with key Chinese institutions including Fudan, Nankai, Peking, Shanghai Jiaotong, Sun Yat-sen, Tsinghua and Xiamen Universities (Tan, 2008, February; Welch, 2011a), other ASEAN members are positioned less favorably with much less well known interactions with China (Welch, 2004, 2010; Kaur, Sirat, & Azman, 2008), although they all see China as a major priority.

Similarly within China, most substantial collaboration and exchange in higher education between China and other ASEAN countries than Singapore are found in the provinces neighboring ASEAN members. While keeping a low profile, there have been vigorous growth and fruitful activities in China's regional higher institutions in such less-developed areas as Guangxi and Yunnan. This differentiated pattern of engagement with China in higher education is worthy of reflection. Different substantially from existing studies of higher education internationalization, that have been focused overwhelmingly on elite (and mostly Western) institutions, the following section features a range of ASEAN countries and regional higher education institutions in China's disadvantaged provinces to depict a much more variegated and complex picture, with an explicit regional focus.

Quiet Achievers in China's Southwest: Two Examples

China's interactions with ASEAN concentrate in its Southwest. Previously, Guangdong played a major role. ASEAN students were once shared largely equally by Guangdong, Guangxi, and Yunnan. While students from Thailand, Burma, Vietnam, and Laos preferred Yunnan, those from Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, and Cambodia tended to choose Guangdong, and those in Guangxi were dominantly from Vietnam (Wei, 2005). With its fast developments, Guangdong has shifted its focus onto Western wealthy countries. Costs have also increased considerably in Guangdong. ASEAN members thus prefer cheaper prices and similar developmental prospects in Guangxi and Yunnan.

Located in southern China and bordering with Vietnam, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region was created specifically for the Zhuang people. The current name “Guang” means “expanse,” and has been associated with the region since the creation of Guang Prefecture in 226 AD. It was given provincial level status during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) and was reformed as one of China’s five minority autonomous regions in 1949.

While some development of heavy industry occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, Guangxi remained largely a scenic tourist destination. Even China’s economic growth in the 1990s seemed to leave Guangxi behind. However in recent years there has been a growing amount of industrialization, and concentration on cash crops. Per capita GDP has begun rising more rapidly, as industries in Guangdong seek a way to locate production to lower wage areas. Its economy still languishes behind that of the wealthy neighbor and twin Guangdong. Its 2011 nominal GDP was about RMB 1,171.4 billion and ranked 18th in China, with its per capita GDP of RMB 25,451 ranked 26th in China. Approved by the State Council, Beihai Export Processing Zone was established in March 2003. It was verified and accepted by Customs General Administration and eight ministries of the state in December 2003. It is the Export Processing Zone nearest to ASEAN in China and also the only one bordering the sea in western China.

All higher education institutions in Guangxi are regional, including nine offering undergraduate programs and above and 46 colleges of two- or three-year vocational and technical training. Among them are Guangxi University, Guangxi Medical University, Guangxi Normal University, Guilin University of Electronic Technology, Guangxi University of Technology, Hechi University, Guangxi University of Finance and Economics, Guilin Medical College, Yulin Normal University, Guangxi Teacher Education University, Guangxi Vocational and Technical College of Communications, Guangxi University for Nationalities, Guilin College of Aerospace Technology, Guilin Normal College, Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College, Guilin Institute of Tourism, Guangxi Police Academy, Yongjiang University, Guangxi Technological College of Machinery and Electricity, Nanning College for Vocational Technology, Youjiang Medical University for Nationalities, Guangxi Arts Institute, Guangxi University of Chinese Medicine, and Guangxi Economic Management Cadre College.

Located in China’s far southwest and spanning approximately 394,000 square kilometers, bordering Burma, Laos and Vietnam, Yunnan is situated in a mountainous area and rich in natural resource, with China’s largest diversity of plant life. It became part of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 AD) during 2nd century BCE, the seat of a Tibeto-Burman speaking kingdom known as the Kingdom of Nanzhao in the 8th century. Nanzhao was multi-ethnic, but the elite most likely spoke a northern dialect of Yi. The Mongols conquered the region in the 13th century, with local control exercised by warlords until the 1930s, when

Japanese occupation in the north forced a migration of Chinese into the region. Yunnan is now noted for its high level of ethnic diversity, with the highest number of ethnic groups among all provinces and autonomous regions in China. Among China's 56 recognized ethnic groups, 25 are found in Yunnan. 38% of the province's population is from minority ethnic groups, including the Yi, Bai, Hani, Tai, Dai, Miao, Lisu, Hui, Lahu, Va, Nakhi, Yao, Tibetan, Jingpo, Blang, Pumi, Nu, Achang, Jinuo, Mongolian, Derung, Manchu, Shui, and Buyi.

Yunnan maintains a strong agricultural focus. It is one of China's relatively undeveloped provinces with more poverty-stricken counties than any other province, lagging far behind the east coast of China in relation to socio-economic development. Its 2011 nominal GDP was about RMB 875.1 billion and ranked 24th in China, with a per capita GDP of RMB 19,038 and ranked 30th in China. However, because of its geographic location, it has comparative advantages in regional and border trade with countries in Southeast Asia. The Lancang River (upper reaches of the Mekong River) is the waterway to Southeast Asia. In recent years land transportation has been improved to strengthen economic and trade cooperation among countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion. Its abundance in resources determines that its pillar industries are: agriculture, tobacco, mining, hydro-electric power, and tourism.

Yunnan has 19 higher education institutions offering undergraduate programs and above, and 13 two- and three-year vocational and technical training colleges. Among them are Yunnan University (which is the only national key university in Yunnan), Kunming University of Science and Technology, Yunnan Agricultural University, Yunnan Normal University, Yunnan University of Finance and Economics, Yunnan University of Nationalities, Southwest Forestry University, Kunming Medical University, Yunnan University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Qujing Normal University, Chuxiong Normal University, Yuxi Normal University, Honghe University, Yunnan Police Officer Academy, Yunnan Arts University, Kunming University, Dali University, Wenshan University, Baoshan College, Kunming Metallurgy College, Qujing Medical College, Chuxiong Medicine College, Baoshan College of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Zhaotong, Simao, Lijiang, Lincang and Dehong Teachers' Colleges, Yunnan Vocational Institute of Energy Technology, Yunnan Land and Resources Vocational College, Yunnan Forestry Technological College, and Yunnan Economics Trade and Foreign Affairs College.

Exchange and Collaboration in Higher Education between ASEAN Members and Guangxi and Yunnan

Recently, China-ASEAN interactions in higher education have increased in both

quantity and quality. As the social and economic links between the two sides continue to strengthen, exchange and cooperation deepen, often going far beyond the higher education sector. For instance, Yunnan Police Officer Academy has trained 240 officers of four batches specialized in drug enforcement for Burma and Laos. During 2007–2010, Yunnan trained 30 civil servants and teachers annually for Vietnam. Guangxi has done similarly (Zhang, 2007). Due to the limited space here, foci are placed only on the following aspects to illustrate more general developments:

Flow of People and Programs

The most evident development is the fast growing numbers of people and programs flowing across national borders in the region. Guangxi has the largest intake of ASEAN students in China from around 1,000 in 2002 to over 3,000 in 2007, the fastest growth in China, with an average of 20%. During 2002–2003, exchanged teachers and students at Guangxi University with Vietnam, Burma, Laos, and Cambodia doubled. In 2006, there were 148 students from ASEAN countries enrolled in degree programs at Guangxi University of Chinese Medicine, among them at least 30 were at Master's level, others were all undergraduate (Zhang, 2007). Foreign student numbers continued to grow to 4,378 in 2008, a 33% increase over 2007. Among them, 3,496 (84%) were from ASEAN countries, with Vietnam's 2,391 students at the top. Meanwhile around 5,000 students from Guangxi studied in ASEAN countries, with Vietnam on the top, followed by Thailand (Gong, 2010). Similarly, around 60% of the 5,000 international students studying in Yunnan in 2006 came from the Greater Mekong Subregion. The percentage increased to 70% in 2007 (Zhang, 2007).

The traffic is increasingly two-way. More and more Chinese students study in ASEAN countries. By early 2007, over 600 Chinese students were enrolled in Burmese, Khmer, Indonesian, Lao, Thai, and Vietnamese programs at Guangxi University for Nationalities. Programs travel across borders as well. Yunnan University offers a Chinese language program in Burma at associate degree level, with its first batch of 58 in-service school teachers (Zhang, 2007). In Malaysia and Singapore, the imported complete packages of educational programs from major English-speaking countries have successfully attracted many Chinese students (Tang & Yang, 2004).

Another interesting development is the incoming of young students during recent years. Since 1993, a growing number of primary students from Vietnam study at Hekou School in Kunming. Some Burmese families choose to send their children to study in Chinese schools near their national border. For instance, Wanding Primary School had recruited over 100 students from Burma by 2006, with an annual intake of 20 (Zhang, 2007).

Institutional Partnerships and Joint Programs

Institutional level exchange and collaboration are becoming regular and frequent, as evidenced by the annual China-ASEAN University President Forum. Higher education institutions in Guangxi, including Guangxi University, Guangxi University for Nationalities, Guangxi University of Chinese Medicine, Guangxi University of Finance and Economics, Guangxi Economic Management Carder College, and Guangxi Vocational and Technical College, have all established wide networks with their counterparts in ASEAN countries (Gong, 2010). From January to June 2007, fifteen ASEAN universities visited Guangxi University to sign collaboration agreements. In Nanning, most of its tertiary higher education institutions have established formal exchange programs with Vietnam, involving teachers, students, commissioned training programs, and collaborative research projects (Tang & Yang, 2004).

Moving from initial student exchange programs, China-ASEAN educational collaboration has now become more stable and diversified. In Yunnan, the University of Nationalities started early and still leads the way. It started to offer 3+1 (three years study in China plus one year in a selected ASEAN country) in 2001. It also has joint undergraduate programs with Vietnam. The newly established Nanning College for Vocational Technology has joint 2+1, 1+3, and 3+2 programs with Nakhon Sawan Rajabhat University and Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University in Thailand (Zhang, 2007).

In Guangxi, the University for Nationalities offers 3+1 and 3.5+0.5 programs to select students from ASEAN languages and other related subjects to study in ASEAN countries for one year or half year. With proficiency in ASEAN languages and cultures, such students are welcomed in the labor market. Another way is to develop joint programs with ASEAN countries, such as 2+2 and 1+3, to select some students who have studied at the university for one or two years before sending them to Vietnam and Thailand for two years. The third way is to offer what is called “compound programs” to couple ASEAN language programs with other specialized fields to train professionals in finance and trade, tourism, management, and law (Gong, 2010). For example, Guangxi University’s 1+4 joint program with Hai Phong University in Vietnam requires students study for one year at Hai Phong focusing on Chinese language learning before studying at Guangxi University for four years (Zhang, 2007).

Language Learning and Teaching

Language education has long been a core part of educational collaboration between ASEAN and Guangxi and Yunnan. There has been an increasing

demand for Chinese language programs in ASEAN countries. In Thailand, schools offering Chinese language courses increased from 242 in 2003 to around 2,000 by the late 2000s, with a total of 400,000 students (Gong, 2010). 400 schools, public and private, made Chinese language a compulsory subject with examinations in 2006. Malaysia had 640,000 primary students learning Chinese, and 5,400 secondary students studied at schools where Chinese was the instructional language (Zhang, 2007). It is necessary to note that precisely because of this, relatively fewer Malaysian students come to China to learn Chinese (Li, 2004). By 2003, Cambodia had at least 80 schools, using Chinese as their instructional language, with a total of 56,000 students. In June 2001, Singapore proposed global curricula for Chinese teaching and learning and established a digital database. In Malaysia and Thailand, the internet has been widely used to teach Chinese.

Meanwhile, more and more Chinese students have shown strong interest in southeast Asian societies, politics, and cultures, and learnt ASEAN members' national languages, particularly Vietnamese, Lao, and Thai. Guangxi has more than 20 tertiary institutions offering Vietnamese language programs and 10 offering Thai programs. Guangxi University for Nationalities offers Burmese, Khmer, Lao, and Indonesian undergraduate programs. Third-year students at the University enrolled in Khmer, Lao, Thai, and Vietnamese programs are required to study for a year in the countries speaking the languages they learn. Students of teaching Chinese as a foreign/second language, international economy and trade, marketing, and tourism at the University all have their opportunities to study for one year or a half year in a Southeast Asian country (Tang & Yang, 2004).

Training and Degree Programs

Short-term training has been a major part of Yunnan-ASEAN educational collaboration. Yunnan University of Nationalities, for example, sends 150 students and teachers to Burma, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam to study their languages. In 2006, Yunnan University and Yunnan Normal University trained 670 Chinese language teachers for Burma, Thailand, and Vietnam. In December 2006, Yunnan Normal University set up Confucius Institutes at Chiang Mai University in Thailand (Luo, 2012, March 13). Based on the development levels of ASEAN countries and China's Southeast, in addition to traditional language training programs, collaboration in vocational training has been growing at various levels to meet societal demands for practical and technical personnel. For instance, sponsored by China's Ministry of Agriculture, Guangxi Agricultural Vocational-Technical College has trained 37 batches of 715 Vietnamese technicians. The College has signed agreements on cooperation in agriculture with Laos and has been given gratuitous approval for the development of 20

hectares of land to grow new vegetables. It has also helped a high school in Tomohon in Indonesia to establish a tertiary vocational institution (International Office of Guangxi Agricultural Vocational-Technical College, 2007, July 18). In 2007, the second vocational middle school in Wuzhou signed an agreement on teaching collaboration with Chanthaburi Vocational College in Thailand to train middle level technicians (Zhang, 2007).

There have been increasing signs of a shift from language and other relatively short-term training to more degree education in a variety of subject areas. Changes to disciplinary scenarios are evident as part of the wider situation of China-ASEAN exchange in education. Previously ASEAN students came to Guangxi mainly for Chinese language training. Now they are more likely to enroll in degree programs in a number of specialized fields including international trade, tourism, computer science, traditional Chinese medicine, business administration, agriculture, life science, and new materials (Tang & Yang, 2004). This is a sign of the general shift to a more specialized, higher level and more compound educational exchange, which is further strengthened by more institutional arrangements between both sides, such as the annual university presidents' forum (Gong, 2010). As China-ASEAN educational exchange deepens, more programs are taken up by ASEAN students including natural and technological sciences, management, and international trade in Yunnan, and bioengineering, chemical industry, journalism and communication in Guangxi (Zhang, 2007).

Region-Specific Strategies

Strategic planning of educational exchange and cooperation with ASEAN countries has often been designed in both Guangxi and Yunnan to meet the specific social economic needs of ASEAN member countries. For example, Yunnan's regulation on foreign students was the first of its kind in China in response to the fast increase of demand from ASEAN students to study in Yunnan. Higher education institutions in Yunnan have been designated different key research focuses, based on their strengths. Most universities in Yunnan have Chinese teaching programs designed for ASEAN students (Li, 2004). Yunnan Normal University has strategic research themes in its different programs targeting specifically at ASEAN issues including human resources development, regional economic cooperation in the Greater Mekong Subregion, and ASEAN languages and cultures.

In comparison with Yunnan, Guangxi shares even more cultural traditions, life style, as well as geographical proximity with ASEAN members. Guangxi has been planning strategically to fully exploit its comparative advantages to increase student numbers from ASEAN (Gong, 2010). Its diversity in higher education

and the low cost of living make it even more popular among ASEAN students as a destination for study. Its universities take such opportunities to establish wide links with higher education institutions in ASEAN countries. Guangxi University, Guangxi Normal University, and Guangxi University for Nationalities have all done this (Li, 2004).

Government scholarships are a strong indicator of strategic planning at both government and institutional levels. Since 2007, Guangxi provincial government decided to offer 20 scholarships annually to Lao students based at Guangxi University for Nationalities. The actual quota has been slightly more: a total of 43 scholarships were offered in 2007 and 2008. The Chinese government has also increased its numbers of scholarships to students from the Greater Mekong Subregion. Guangxi was allocated 100 from the Ministry of Education. Again, the plan was over fulfilled: 122 scholarships from the central government were offered in 2008, with 40 to Vietnam, 29 to Laos, 24 to Thailand, nine to Burma and Indonesia respectively, and nine to Cambodia (Gong, 2010).

Concluding Remarks

The above account of China-ASEAN interactions in higher education demonstrates an emerging regionalism in Asia (Mok, 2012). Through regional collaborations, Southeast Asian higher education institutions enable themselves to establish stronger voices in global policy dialogues (Robertson, 2010, March). This can be seen as part of a broader strategy to assert regional and global leadership. Via regional and global alliances through research collaborations, joint academic programs, and academic exchanges, East and Southeast Asian higher education institutions are building up their regional community. Such regionalization takes shape in a far more multi-polar world order, and acts as a response to globalization linking the local to the global. It confirms Söderbaum's (2002) judgment that much of the reality of today's regionalism is not well captured by concepts of state-led regional projects, nor is it found in a dichotomy of state and non-state actors either. As noted above, local institutions and governments have been proactive to interact with their counterparts in ASEAN member countries, while China's central administration's role has been mainly confined to setting the tone of relevant policies. Such an experience demonstrates a need for (re)considering the role of non-state actors in fostering regional community.

While it remains to be seen whether or not and how China can succeed in its strategic shift back to Asia, its interactions with ASEAN countries in higher education have demonstrated strong reciprocity. In the process of deepening relationships with ASEAN members, the Chinese partners have paid respect to

their ASEAN counterparts and explicitly supported the ASEAN Way. The ASEAN+3 remain an ASEAN-centered institution, and ASEAN members have dominated the chairship of the meetings (Yoshimatsu, 2009). This shows China's adoption of a status quo-oriented diplomacy and its acceptance of extant international institutions and the US dominance of the international and regional power structures, as China participates in multilateral processes actively (Johnson, 2003). Its engagement in regional affairs has served to stabilize regional order by gaining favorable perceptions from its neighboring states as a constructive partner for them (Shambaugh, 2004/2005), creating a benign and stable regional order (Kang, 2003).

Both China and ASEAN appear to be committed to furthering exchange and collaboration in higher education (Third ASEAN-China Rectors' Conference, 2010). The inaugural China-ASEAN Education Minister Roundtable Conference and the third China-ASEAN Education Cooperation Week were held in Guiyang in August 2010, where ASEAN education ministers discussed with China how to widen cooperation and exchanges in higher education and strengthen regional development. Described as a mark of a new stage in China-ASEAN educational exchanges (Xinhua News, 2010, August 3), the conference's three sub-themes included improving the quality of higher education and promoting regional economic development and talent cultivation, fulfilling the role of higher education in the sustainable development of a low-carbon economy, and strengthening China-ASEAN education cooperation and exchange measures including intercollegiate cooperation, student exchanges, and language teaching (Azaraimy, 2010, August 7). It signals determination from both sides to establish comprehensive partnerships of collaboration in education and develop new methods of educational exchanges with regional characteristics.

Last but not least, China's projection of soft power through higher education in Southeast Asia has been mainly achieved by its regional higher education institutions in less developed areas. Such experiences highlight the fact that internationalization is not always confined to elite higher education institutions. As third- and even fourth-tier institutions within the Chinese higher education system, such "quiet achievers" in China's less developed provinces are hardly visible in global or even domestic ranking exercises. Instead, they have been largely ignored or forgotten. However, their down-to-earth contribution to bridging peoples between China and ASEAN member countries speaks loudly, and warns us against losing sight of the bulk of higher education systems.

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