Editorial

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With the strong conviction to enhance their global competitiveness, governments across different parts of the world have tried various means to transform their higher education systems in order to strengthen national competitiveness at the international level. Some major strategies being adopted by governments from different parts of the globe are to (1) promote the rankings of their universities in the global university leagues; (2) promote internationalization in curriculum design and student learning; (3) enrich student learning through enhancement of student mobility; (4) engage in the quest for regional education hub status. In order to better position themselves in the global university leagues, Asian governments have made serious efforts to promote student mobility and internationalization in higher education (Portnoi *et al.*, 2010; Mok and Yu, 2011; Welch, 2011). This special issue sets out, within the context of internationalization of higher education and the rise of education hubs in the region, to examine the issues related to transnational higher education (TNHE) and student mobility in East Asia.

It is generally perceived that TNHE has galvanized the development of higher education in terms of teaching. Among all Asian countries, China is one of the fastest growing places of TNHE, which has caught the interest of K.C. Ong and David Chan, who examine in their article the blossoming of TNHE programmes and foreign-local co-run schools in China. What are the drivers of such growth? As Ong and Chan argue, it is mainly linked to the socio-economic changes taking place in China. TNHE development in China began to accelerate in the 1990s, when it needed more human capital for a higher level of economic development. Other factors also include the rising educational demand by the young population, and the need for internationalizing the higher education sector. But as TNHE has continued to expand, the Chinese government has turned away from an originally ‘informal, incidental and rather laissez-faire’ approach to a regulatory one. The 21st century has witnessed a more robust development of TNHE in China, as it has increasingly integrated with the world economy, for example the admittance to the World Trade Organization, which attempts to open up a world market of educational services. Against this background, the varieties of TNHE programmes offered by different institutions across different regions are examined in the article to illustrate the prospects of TNHE in China. At the end of the article, the

authors discuss the potential difficulties it is now facing, mostly the lagging behind of quality assurance mechanism amidst rapid expansion.

While many people like Ong and Chan are giving positive reactions to the rise of TNHE for its economic potential and the increased educational opportunities, Li-Chuan Chiang's article provides a critical reflection of TNHE in East Asia. In her article, Chiang raises some critical issues: the fact that TNHE has always prioritized teaching at the expense of research and community service, the other traditional missions of university; the low quality of TNHE programmes (in terms of medium of instruction, programme materials, teaching staff); and the over-commercialization of TNHE programmes, which are more vocationally oriented than academic in nature. Apart from these practical concerns, from a critical cultural perspective, Chiang is most worried about the intrusion of 'western-dominated pedagogies and curriculum from abroad to home via importing TNHE', which Chiang regards as 'the Trojan Horse'.

Similarly, Aaron Koh also shares the same worry about the rise of TNHE in Asia, and he pays particular attention to the fact that outward-bound student mobility is harmful to human capital building of a state, as in his case study of Singapore. According to Koh, human capital is critical to a small city-state like Singapore, where natural resources are scarce and the manufacturing base is small. In the past few years, the Singaporean leaders and society have been increasingly aware of the potential harm of student outflow in the context of the rise of TNHE. Arguing that Singapore has been pursuing 'tactical globalization', in which the state adopts a pragmatic way to seize on the potential and opportunities offered by globalization but also to actively deal with negative consequences of globalization, for example brain drain, Koh examines the 'tactics of intervention' by the Singaporean government to retain and nurture local talent and attract foreign talent in the battle for human capital for economic growth. Such tactics include offering scholarships, changing immigration policies and maintaining ties with overseas Singaporeans.

In fact, in thinking about the broad picture of brain drain in Asia in recent years, the past understanding that TNHE would favour the West and undermine the East (student outflow always occurs from Asia to western developed countries, as students mostly aspire to study in those places and intended to stay there for work after graduation) has been rendered increasingly problematic in regard to rising horizontal mobility of students within the Asian region. As Sheng-Ju Chan argues in his article, the signs of change are linked to the shift in the global balance of power, when many Asian countries have increased competition for human capital (within and also beyond Asia) for advancing national competitiveness. These Asian countries have taken efforts both domestically and internationally. Domestically, they

have restructured the higher education sectors to increase their attractiveness. Internationally, they have sought more presence in the international scene, for example, by bringing in more foreign resources, such as inviting leading foreign institutions to enter the local markets, and aligning themselves with international accreditation organizations and joining international institutional networks.

In delineating the development of TNHE from the perspectives of international change and institutional transformation as mentioned above, what is often missing in the discussion is the perspective of the students engaging in TNHE. In this regard, we have in this special issue collected two articles — Ka Ho Mok's case studies on Singapore and Malaysia, and Hao Jie and Anthony Welch's case on China. From the perspective of students' learning experience, Ka Ho Mok's article discusses the characteristics of TNHE in Singapore and Malaysia, the two potential education hubs in Asia. Having conducted focus groups and interviews of students engaging in TNHE in Singapore and Malaysia, Mok finds overseas studying experience a major attraction for overseas students in the two countries. It is not only the overseas studying experience, but also overseas academic qualifications that drive students to engage in TNHE. That is why students are enthusiastic about twinning programmes (e.g., co-organized programmes by one local institution and by one foreign institution) because having the name of a foreign school printed on an academic certificate leads to better career prospects in their own countries. And as Mok discovers, students in Singapore are more satisfied with TNHE programmes than their counterparts in Malaysia, because Singapore has been more strategically and carefully selective in bringing in foreign partners than Malaysia.

In the case of China, Hao Jie and Anthony Welch also discover the same phenomenon that the overseas studying experience has long been regarded as a gold ticket to the employment market. The high-skilled returnees, who are called 'Hai Gui' (sea turtles), have always been highly sought by employers, because the overseas qualification they possess is a guarantee of one's quality, as China's higher education development had been halted for a long period of time before the 1980s. After graduation in foreign countries, the high-skilled returnees are motivated to come back to China by the expanding career opportunities concomitant to the rise of the Chinese economy, a sense of national identity, and also the desire to contribute to the country. However, in examining the job-seeking experiences of high-skilled returnees who have returned from Australia to China, Hao and Welch find that, as the higher education sector of China has been improving in recent years, their career paths are not as promising as before, as now they have to face competition from student graduates from top universities in the country. And, although they are Chinese natives, they have the added difficulty of

having to reintegrate into a rapidly changing China after a period of time away from the country.

The collection of articles in this issue has provided comparative perspectives and international insights when analysing the growing trend of TNHE in Asia. The authors in this special issue have highlighted not only the growing popularity of student mobility, they have attempted to critically examine the socio-cultural implications for the rise of TNHE and student learning in Asia. Embracing internationalization among higher education systems in Asia has clearly suggested that Asian countries are very keen to become more international, but we must be sensitive about how the notion of 'internationalization' is understood. Internationalization should not be interpreted as an overemphasis of other cultures and languages, but as an under-valuation of the local and domestic traditions, values, cultures and languages. In the quest for internationalization, Asian universities should have engaged in serious efforts for the rediscovery of Asian scholarship, introducing the uniqueness of Asian values, traditions and cultures through international connectivity in terms of academic exchange and international research collaboration. For in doing so Asian universities would be able to contribute to a better understanding of internationalization by playing up the role of 'Asianization' in order to contribute to the international community dominated by the West.

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