Asian Higher Education in the Era of Contemporary Globalization: Introduction

The rise of Asian Higher Education has been the source of a significant amount of scholarship over the past three decades, triggered largely by the extraordinary degree and reach of its massification over that period. With China's decision to reform and open its higher education system to significant expansion in 1998, a process was initiated unlike any previously seen as the higher education system was expanded for new millions of students utilizing resources from both private and public sectors. The same can be witnessed in India and Indonesia where even a small percentage rise in the gross enrollment ratio to higher education would see additional huge numbers of students admitted into the higher education systems because of their huge population base. Previous decades had witnessed similar growth in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan as those societies also provided significant resources to radically expand access to higher education.

We, like many others, find the forces underlying and propelling these events to be directly related to what we view as the overall forces, dynamics and effects of contemporary globalization. Among its other properties observable since shortly after the conclusion of World War II has been the significant movement of manufacturing and industry from the "older industrial countries" into those of the then-perceived "third" world to initially and then massively gain the advantage of relatively inexpensive labor within manufacturing processes. In terms that quickly became commonplace, the world grew accustomed to referring to the "de-industralization" of the USA and Europe, the rise of "new economies" in Latin American and Asia accompanied by the re-emergence of Japan as a rebuilt industrial power propelling a newly invented "quality movement."

Within a decade significant amounts of the global shipbuilding industry had moved to Asia, most notably in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. The "multinational corporation" quickly progressed from being a novel economic term to being a signifier of "new ways" of aggregating capital and placing it in global production (Barnett and Mueller 1974). By the mid-1980s large segments of non-manufacturing industries in fashion and clothing manufacture had relocated to Southeast Asia, and the entire region had become a major player in relatively

new industries ranging from consumer electronics and services to pharmaceuticals and medical equipment to novel service occupations such as call centers. (These dynamics are comprehensively described within the recent review of globalization by Steger et al. 2014.) Off the center stage for many was the equally rapid and important development of a global financial structure that "re-centered" critical aspects of global capital from national to regional and global patterns of interaction, a process accompanied in various ways by global redistributions of wealth. By the end of the 1980s, David Harvey would signal elements of this transition of a familiar world into one of newer and unpredictable patterns as "the condition of post-modernity"—marking a break between important elements of familiarity in the structures of society and their processes and those emergent in this postmodern world of globalization (Harvey 1989).

While globalization has been centered on finance and manufacturing, its progress has been less clear in such cultural and traditionally nationalistic areas as education. Indeed there has been a nationalistic resurgence of higher education as the "internationalizaton" efforts so widely touted in much of Asia have given way to an inwardness in areas such as student mobility, exchanges, faculty joint research efforts, publications, and several other indices. There has also been a unique and stimulating discussion of Asian educational roots, or the rise of hybrid (Asian and Western) forms of higher education, as distinct from the previous "western transfer" paradigm.

The pursuit of massification of higher education is one goal that has been adopted in much of Asia, largely influenced by the experience in North America. Martin Trow, in 1974, generalizing from structures and dynamics he was observing in the USA, postulated that higher education was on a trajectory to pass through three stages (Trow 1974). In the first, which he named as the *elite* stage, up to 15 percent of the population would have access to higher education, a generalization familiar to much of the literature on the sociology of industrial and pre-industrial societies which views the primary historical *function* of higher education to have been the social reproduction of elites, creating a supply of educated persons to "run and sustain" society and its most important institutions. The next stage of higher education expansion in which 15–50 percent of the population is engaged, Trow termed a *massification* stage wherein a significant portion of the population is drawn into higher education and the skills and knowledge imparted through the processes that have become themselves part of the macro social structure of role and skill reproduction. The third stage of the process, in which more than 50 percent of the population is exposed to higher education, he termed *universalization,* meaning in effect that anyone choosing to seek a higher education experience can have access of some sort to the process.

As the chapters in all of the following sections of this *Handbook* detail, this process of higher education massification has been one of the dominant themes within all of Asia over the past three decades. It has presented an interesting dilemma as well, as higher education systems begin to develop in a region long characterized by a small elite sector, buttressed by a burgeoning private sec-

tor, and challenged by competing notions of access and equity. There remain many issues related to differential missions of each of the sub-sectors of higher education (elite, provincial/public/private, community college and vocational technical, research oriented). High stakes testing regimes remain a powerful sorting device for most nations in the region in the midst of discussions about testing reform and its implications for access and equity. All of this illustrates the complexity of the competing forces and factors of globalization and national interests (and the hybrid policies that emerge from this interaction).

The plan of this *Handbook* reflects the various ways in which this complex pattern of globalization/national interest dynamics operating among other forces has continued to frame and be expressed within the wide variety of higher education structures and experiences that exist within the Asian environment.

The first section (Part I) presents seven chapters that elaborate on the nature and dynamics of these various globalization forces as they are articulated within discrete higher education settings. Taken collectively, they are intended as a "sketch" of the breadth and variety of formations and impacts global dynamics have on regional higher education and its institutional structures.

The second section (Part II) focuses explicitly on the nature of regionality in Asian higher education with a broad set of chapters that seek to trace elements of commonality and affinity within the complex notions of what constitutes "Asia." In addition they also take note of discrete differences that arise about the notion of "region" which necessarily implies elements of similarity. The reality of "Asia" as a historical, social and intellectual construct admits to significant differentiation that results from the lengthy, complex and powerful national histories which have served as the framing platform for the contemporary social experiences of these nation states.

The third section (Part III) focuses explicitly on four processes that are necessary elements of the massification process which underlies so much of this regional higher education: the roles played by the issues of access, equity, capacity, and quality. As documented by these chapters, access is the critical first step to higher education massification. The countries represented in this collection of higher education experiences have approached and accomplished the pursuit and acquisition of access with both commonality and difference. How access is approached and accomplished is intimately related to issues of capacity: to what "things" and "processes" is access being created, and for what purposes? Indeed as we see in these chapters the critical policy question of "higher education for what?" is never absent from the process and how that question is both posed and answered, in turn, owes much to how policy discourse is shaped and attenuated by yet other superordinating globalization influence such as the role that neoliberalism has played and continues to play in defining and articulating the higher education sector of these societies.

The complex interplay of these two forces is given both an important portion of its rationale and its expression in how they are articulated within the context of creating equity. The discourse (s) of equity is (are) conducted differently within each of these societies, reflecting the particular historical, cultural and national

experiences that have been carried forward into the contemporary era, for example, with respect to race, gender, religion, and class, language , but as we see in the chapters presented in this section, equity plays a significant role in all stages of massification. For example, initially it enters boldly into considerations of for whom will access be created and under what conditions, and in later stages in terms of how continued development of systems of higher education will be "built out" and for what purposes. Here also are the presence, and in some respects, dominating structures of high stakes testing and "shadow" education. As we will see, equity issues more recently have entered into almost all higher education systems in the construct of what has commonly come to be termed the "alignment dilemma," the situation that exists when systems of higher education generate large numbers of graduates for whom uncertain prospects of societal employment exist.

Finally, as we will see throughout this section, issues of quality are never absent from this process, but change their features as systems expand, mature, develop, and become more sophisticated. Quality within higher education is an issue present in any and every system wherever located. As a property of a higher education system and as an "outcome," it is a "thing" that is expected and required from all institutions. However, even a brief inspection of quality as a concept reveals its varying complexities, a circumstance that only increases as one seeks to develop and apply "standards" of quality across widely differing structural situations.

The chapters in this section of the *Handbook* weave these four elements of the contemporary higher education experience together in a variety of contexts, ranging from how their interplay works in a given discrete country circumstance to broader conceptual examinations of what these complex elements of the higher education experience can and do mean in comparative contexts.

The final section of the *Handbook* is devoted to country studies. In most cases we have offered one per country, but in the case of China, given its relative size and influence in the region, we have provided two. In working with the individual chapter contributors, we asked them to examine the broad focus on the framing that the dynamics of globalization have had on higher education and emphasize those elements that in their view were the most salient. In some cases this has involved including a particular country "lens" as well through which to articulate the issue. The result, we believe, is an excellent blend of attention to nation-specific detail and linkage to the broader elements of globalization to which this volume is committed.

References

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