

Higher Education in Asia: Quality, Excellence and Governance

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Darryl S. L. Jarvis · Ka Ho Mok
Editors

Transformations in Higher Education Governance in Asia

Policy, Politics and Progress

 Springer

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For Oscar and Flannan
Darryl S. L. Jarvis

To Jasmine, Esther and Lucinda
Ka Ho Mok

Preface

As the fastest-growing region in the world, Asia represents a complex assortment of states collectively experiencing rapid social and political transformation. Not surprisingly, Asia's recent history is often cast in tombs that announce the 'rise of Asia' or the 'new Asian century', reflecting the region's economic dynamism in industrial production, manufacturing, assembly and the increasing proportion of global economic activity that it generates. But while Asia's most recent history has been written largely in relation to its increasing importance in global supply chains and as 'factory to the world', the region's immediate future resides in higher-order economic activities, in science, technology and through leadership in research and innovation. Rapid growth in Asia's economies has thus equally been reflected in rapidly expanding higher education systems, rising participation in tertiary-level education, the development of high-performing tertiary education systems and world-class universities.

These trends, however, have not been uniform. Highly disparate national systems of governance, institutional capacities and levels of political and economic development continue to define the region. The challenges each country face may thus be contiguous insofar as similar sets of aspirations often define policy debates about desired sector outcomes, but set against wide-ranging political, economic and institutional realities.

As the contributors to this volume acknowledge, despite the prevalence of a common set of aspirations, the policy pathways to realizing internationally leading higher education systems remain opaque and often vexed. Higher education systems are not simply compilations of knowledge factories that can be set in place by edict or resource allocation. The academic enterprise remains peculiar, if not idiosyncratic, with knowledge production, discovery, scientific breakthroughs and innovation often non-responsive to linear technocratic planning or systems design. System, institutional and programme quality, for example, are not typically 'fixed' by adding resources alone, or high-quality academic labour 'produced' by simply allocating quota in the hope of achieving short-term knowledge/innovation outcomes. Were it so simple, higher education systems would be much less diverse,

performance more equal and competitive knowledge attainment more equitably distributed.

Often to the distress of policy-makers, developing high-performing higher education systems rests on much less quantifiable or tangible policy levers: soft-institutional and governance technologies able to support the development of academic labour; informal network configurations between government, universities and industry that leverage research capacity; didactic feedback systems able to calibrate training, curriculum and university teaching with the skill attributes of graduates and national development agendas; and mentoring cultures that nurture knowledge development and research collaboration—in other words, the mushy ethereal stuff to which simple policy prescriptions or metrics of analysis are not well suited.

Variation in policy and governance approaches to higher education thus witnesses profound structural differences in the composition and organization of Asia's higher education systems, along with diversity in the mix of public versus private provision, equity and access, institutional and programme quality, and the development and treatment of academic labour.

Governing higher education in Asia thus continues to be a complex, multifaceted and challenging set of policy problems, set amid fast-changing regional and international dynamics and deepening competition for global leadership in research and innovation. We hope this collection of papers contributes to a broader understanding of Asia's rapidly changing higher education landscapes and of their emerging and potential trajectories.

Hong Kong, China

Darryl S. L. Jarvis
Ka Ho Mok

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