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## **THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA AND CHINA**

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## Abstract

This paper provides a scenario-based understanding of main changes and standing features of higher education in Malaysia and China with a comparative perspective. The comparative approach herein goes around three dimensions, namely, the quantitative change of higher education, the running of higher education, and the qualitative change of higher education. The central hypothesis is that changes of higher education in Malaysia and China since the 1990s are more similar than different, with size expansion, structural development, orientation to the market and cross-border education being the more prominent shared macro-themes that are interconnected and largely characterize the landscape of higher education in these two Asian countries. From the quantitative dimension, both Malaysian and Chinese higher education systems experienced a transition from elite to mass access with a diversified structure. In terms of change of operation patterns, market-related mechanisms that illustrate the notions of privatization and decentralization have been established. A distinct difference is with private sector of higher education in the role, mission as well as policy treatment. Behind all the privatization and decentralization issues is a national regulatory framework for running higher education in Malaysia and China. As for qualitative dimension, extensive cross-border outreach has become new initiative to achieve qualitative improvement of higher education in the two countries. At the institutional level, internationalization at Malaysian universities and Chinese universities shows a lot more commonalities regarding organizational activities and academic activities. However, between public institutions and private ones, the pictures of internationalization are very different. The noteworthy similarity in internationalization from the macro perspective is that both Malaysia and China are not only a major education importer, but also an emerging competitive education exporter. For research on higher education in Malaysia or China, or a comparative study, topics concerning the appropriate ways for carrying out the functions of higher education and attaining the ultimate goals of it under authoritarian neoliberalism need more exploration.

**Keywords:** Higher Education; Expansion; Marketisation; Internationalization; State

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## **Introduction**

Since the 1990s, the context in which higher education functions has been labeled as ever changing. The Futures Project hosted by Brown University proposed four universal factors that impact the higher education community in countries around the world from the 1990s (the Futures Project, 2000: 4). Among them the first and foremost is the shift from manufacturing-based economies to knowledge-based economies. In this transition, the importance of physical capital and massive production is fading away while knowledge and knowledge-intensified innovations claim more strength to be “the source of present (and future) wealth” (World Bank, 2000), calling for the preparation of more human resources with qualifications of higher education and leading to the second contextual factor, namely the rising demand for more access to higher education and the increased enrolment at higher education institutions. In this regard, the third factor loomed large and became discernible, that is, the existing higher education system became overloaded as it fell into the growing dilemma between the obligation to offer more seats at universities and the system’s insufficient capacity due to the fiscal pressure. Under these circumstances, new providers, mainly non-university institutions featuring shorter training cycles and private institutions as well, appeared in large number to fill the gap left by the public system, as the national government has been slowly yet steadfastly stepping back in the public provision of higher education. The fourth factor is the technological advances in the functioning of higher education, such as information and communications technology (ICT), in running academic activities. The wide use of ICT exerts strong influences to alter the forms or ways in the operation and management of higher education.

Essentially all the forces noted above can be understood as underpinning both the quantitative demand and qualitative demand in higher education and a need of equilibrium in them, which are largely unmet in developing countries (Prakash, 2007: 3249). By comparison with the developed countries, developing countries were latecomers to the stage of modernization of higher education. Among a handful of upper middle-income developing countries, which have been actively responding to these forces by undertaking overall reforms of higher

education on a top-down approach, particularly in the Asian region, Malaysia and China stand out to be typical cases. Malaysia initiated its systematic higher education reform since the middle of the 1990s, while dramatic changes of higher education with larger number of institutions, academics and students involved began in the early 1990s in China. This paper sets out by collecting the higher education-related contexts in Malaysia and China, and attempts to define the key changes of higher education around several thematic lines, providing a scenario-based understanding of standing features of higher education in the two countries with a comparative perspective, by which similarities would be highlighted.

## **The Malaysian and Chinese Contexts of Higher Education**

### *The Malaysian Context*

The New Economic Policy period ended in Malaysia in 1990, partly due to the facts that the main socio-economic objectives of this ethnic equity-driven policy were not fully achieved, yet complaints and dissatisfactions of the non-Malay population were piling up. Former Prime Minister Mohamad Mahathir's paper, entitled "Malaysia: The Way Forward", which was submitted to the Malaysian Business Council in 1991, came to guide Malaysia in a new way to achieve fully industrialized status by 2020.

The Vision 2020 identified nine strategic challenges, the gist of which is the building of Malaysia into a united, more open, liberal and progressive nation that is able to prosper and grow more competitive in an era of globalization (Suhana, 2012). In this transformation process, Malaysians have been called upon to become citizens intimate with their national origins and identity, adaptive and knowledgeable, with sense of originality, credibility and innovativeness. These tasks, translated into mission statements of feasible national plans, indicate that education, higher education sector in particular, should take the lead in achieving these national goals (Subramani, 2000: 149). In the frameworks of national development based on Vision 2020, "education hub of excellence" has emerged as a core concept regarding Malaysian educational aspiration and the actual path to it, reiterated in the National Plans after 1996 and National Higher Education Strategic Plan in 2007, as well as in media

reports and institutional mission statements. This hub vision, as an indispensable part of Vision 2020, is in essence about becoming a major education exporter in the world. In recent years Malaysia has already been acknowledged worldwide as a regional student hub (Knight, 2011) on the global map. This was achieved largely thanks to the Malaysian government's dedicated efforts in strengthening national higher education competitive edge in global student market by means of cooperating with overseas institutions of higher learning, mostly the ones from western countries, and championing Malaysia's international education brand. The transformation of Malaysia into an education hub comes along with a vibrant economy of ambitious goals—in 2015 the per capita GDP in Malaysia was recorded at 9, 557 USD in 2015 by IMF, and this figure is anticipated to reach 15, 000 USD in 2020. Indeed, higher education sector with a growing emphasis on quality has contributed to the strong growth of Malaysian economy by creating a larger pool of qualified human resources, which is the lasting momentum for an increasingly knowledge-based society.

### *The Chinese Context*

Since the adoption of opening-up policy and the initiation of economic reforms in the late 1970s, China's detachment from Soviet-style industrialization speeded up and the country has been on a road towards a strong socialist market economy. In 2014 per capita GDP in China is recorded at 7,990 USD, about 25 times higher than that of 1990.

The new paradigm of economic development has been broadened into an overall economic reconstruction so as to revitalize the nation under the China Dream proposed by the Chinese President Xi Jinping. The gist of the Dream is re-establishing China's position as a world leader in science and technology as well as in economy and diplomacy. (Fasulo, 2015: 19). In fact from Deng Xiaoping's Theory to current Xi Jinping's China Dream, the core parts of the Chinese national ideologies at different periods of time have been related to the development of education, science and technology, which has been deemed as the fundamental forces to drive forward the Chinese nation. The development of higher education in particular is further considered as the cornerstone of the China Dream (Hong & Liu, 2013: 15). In this

connection, as China is heading to a moderately well-off society by 2020 and by about 2050 will be a fully modernized nation, its long-term ambitious goal of higher education has been set as transforming China into a regional and global hub of higher education, so that adequate qualified human capital for the national development could be anticipated and ensured.

### **Comparing Malaysia and China: Comparability, Dimensions and Method**

For research on higher education, which might be often bound by the constraints of national thinking, a comparative perspective is especially valuable because academic institutions worldwide stem from common traditions, and the issues facing higher education around the world have many common characteristics (Altbach & Peterson, 1999: 1). In this sense, higher education researches with a cross-country perspective are feasible by nature. However, whether this comparative approach applies well or not with cases of Malaysia and China and how rest a lot with a focused structure that consists of the comparative analysis, the dimensions of comparison and comparative method. This structure follows the two fundamental steps in working out a comparison, namely first, establishing that the objects are of the same kind; second, sorting out the key dimensions to compare, which entail a specific comparative method that matches.

With a tremendous Malaysian-Chinese proportion of the population, a great many Chinese elements can be traced in Malaysian historical, social context. Under this background, researches on cultural issues of Malaysian-born Chinese and Chinese immigrants are traditional focus either for Chinese studies in Malaysia or for Malaysian studies in China. Since the establishment of China-Malaysia diplomatic relation in 1974, more academic interests from both parties were seen in areas of political and economic ties. In recent years, as both Malaysian and Chinese higher education systems have been through great changes, researchers began to explore such issues as governance (Soaib & Sufean, 2012; Norzaini, 2012; Wang, 2015), historical evolution (Lian, 2005; Hayhoe, 1989), privatization (Zhang, 2004; Wang, 2014), cross-border education (Hill, et al., 2014; Li, 2006; Li, 2015; Li & Chen 2014), policies (Hayhoe, et al., 2011; Zhong & Wang 2012; Selvaraj, et al., 2014). As

Malaysia-China exchanges in higher education are becoming more frequent and deepened, there have been a growing number of researches on these experiences in particular (Zhang & Chen, 2012; Zhang, 2015; Low, et. al., 2015). A few comparative studies were done, yet all of which are centered on economic, cultural or political themes. Little has been available in the literature that develops a holistic picture of higher education with a comparative perspective.

### *Question of Comparability*

As Chapman and Sarvi (Chapam & Sarvi, 2016: 26) suggest, any analysis of higher education issues across East and Southeast Asia must be treated with great caution for the amazing disparities and vast complexities among the countries in this region. Thus the question of comparability is especially important herein and needs to be considered in the first place. Between Malaysia and China there is not only geographical proximity but also closer bilateral relations that draw them even closer ever since the early 1970s with Malaysia being the first one in ASEAN countries to go for establishing diplomatic relations with China. As Sino-Malaysian relations matured, the two-way flow of culture, business and people prospered. In recent years student mobility at tertiary level between Malaysia and China has gained even greater momentum from their agreement for mutual recognition in higher education qualifications. Besides these factors, the contexts of higher education in Malaysia and China noted above reveal striking similarities either in their educational achievements as student hubs in the Asian region and their master plans to be global ones, or in their current status quo of economic development as upper middle-income nations, or in their ambitious goals for the future. Close relations, enough common grounds and equivalences among the two countries allow for a much meaningful comparative understanding.

### *Key Dimensions*

Despite varying specific contexts, there has been remarkable similarity across the Asian region in the issues that higher education systems now confront and the main strategies national governments are using to address those issues (ADB, 2011: 5). According to an Asian Development Bank's study, continuous expansion in access, a good reflection of

tertiary aged cohort increase and an evolving economy with more emphasis on knowledge and innovation, led to the interconnected important issues of higher education across Asia, such as quality demand, diversified ownership, financial independence and governance change. These interconnected pressures and corresponding government strategies justify the basis of three macro dimensions in understanding the development of higher education across the region, namely, first, the quantitative changes; second, the operation, i.e. the running of higher education, which covers ownership, finance and governance, etc.; third and last, the qualitative development, which is more an internal demand within the frameworks of globalization and internationalization of higher education nowadays. A growing number of Asian countries, the emerging industrialized economies in particular, have promoted cross-border collaboration as first priority in national higher education agenda, not only for better satisfying access demand, but also for enhancing the quality and international integration into the global community of higher education. Thus this internationalization strategy has subsequently topped the list of strategies of institutions of higher education in general (ADB, 2011: 5). The three dimensions drawn from the Asia-based study of ADB are to be taken for a comparative overview of the situation and trends of higher education in Malaysia and China, because all the higher education dynamics indicated by the three dimensions have had most profound demonstrations in these two emerging knowledge-based economies from the late 1970s to the present.

### *Method*

For comparative studies in education, George Bereday (1964: 10-28) proposes a comparative method composed of two main parts, area studies, which is concerned with an individual country or region, and comparative studies, which is concerned with countries or regions simultaneously. He further divides the area studies into descriptive and interpretative phases, and comparative studies are divided into juxtaposition and actual comparison. Bereday's comparative method will be used herein because it presents a more logical form of comparison with area studies providing the building blocks for the subsequent comparative studies and each of the four key steps in it laying the foundation for the next to form an



integrated whole. The exercise of these steps noted follows the general rules of a comparative study, and yet it also needs to fit in the particularities of this study.

#### 1) Description

Description would be accomplished mainly through a combination of extensive collection and reading of primary, secondary and auxiliary sources of research materials concerning higher education in Malaysia and China. The focus at this stage would be the collection and in-depth reviewing of related materials. Accordingly, relevant policy and regulation, statistics published by the national government are the main type of the materials needed, with scholarly articles and books on the subject of higher education to be important complements.

#### 2) Interpretation

As for the interpretative work that follows, key contextual changes over the past decades would be described first, and historical, socio-economic and educational elements would be examined and related to specific higher education change, as it is difficult to examine pure data about higher education development without making reference to the overall environment.

#### 3) Juxtaposition: points of comparison and the central hypothesis

Both tabular and textual juxtapositions would then be employed to sort out points of comparison suited for this study and the central hypothesis as well. At this stage, ADB's interpretation of the key issues of Asian higher education would be of more reference. Thus under each of the macro-dimensions noted above, the points of comparison are further identified: for "quantitative change", they are "access and structure"; for "operation", they are "ownership and governance"; for "qualitative change", "cross-border outreaches". The central hypothesis is that changes of higher education in Malaysia and China since the 1990s are more similar than different, with size expansion, structural development, orientation to the market and cross-border education being the more shared macro-themes that largely characterize the landscape of higher education in these two Asian countries.

#### 4) Comparison

Upon the handling of the juxtapositions, comparison would be demonstrated in the parts that follow. At this stage, balanced comparison would be more favored. This means that

information from Malaysia will be matched and balanced with comparable information from China. "Comparable" in this case refers to the fact that similarities and differences between the two countries will be shown. Balanced comparison by rotation occurs when information around a particular subject from either Malaysia or China is presented in consecutive paragraphs, and when information from both countries becomes part of a merged simultaneous discussion of compared elements, there comes balanced comparison by fusion (Bereday, 1969: 10), which is supplementary to rotation. However, where balanced comparison is not advisable due to likely imprecision or insufficiency of information out of relevant materials, illustrative comparison would then be resorted to, which refers to the drawing at random of educational practices in different countries as illustrations of comparative points.

### **Growth: Expansion and Diversification**

#### *Access*

Along the independence from British colonization in 1957, education in Malaysia soon began the process of nationalization and was regarded as the principal instrument for Malaysian unification and human resources development. Primary education and secondary education were made the first priorities of national education planning and investments in the first couple of years since 1957, and thus laid a relatively good basis for the fast expansion of student enrolments and that of institutions at the two levels in the years that followed. By 1990 Malaysia achieved enrolment rates of 83% at lower secondary level and approximately 50% at upper secondary level, respectively, the latter figure rising significantly to about 72.5% in 2004 (Arokiasamy & Fook, 2008: 78). Higher attendance of students in the upper secondary age group in turn creates a larger pool of qualified students to enter university. Thus liberalization of higher education from the 1990s through the early 21<sup>st</sup> century was much anticipated in line with this democratization of secondary education. The number of institutions of higher education in Malaysia expanded in response, from University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur established in 1961, up to nearly three hundred higher education institutions scattered over in every state and federal territory of the country by 1995. Besides, all these

institutions were given government directives to enlarge their capacity to accommodate more enrolments. And yet it did not work much out that in 1995, only 11% of the tertiary age group of young people in Malaysia was eventually enrolled into the tertiary institutions (Lee, 1999). In the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the participation rate (17-24 year cohort) reached 36% (Arokiasamy & Fook, 2008: 79) in 2007 and 40% (Wong 2013) in 2011 respectively. Despite that, there has been an ambitious goal indicated by the National Higher Education Strategic Plan Beyond 2020, which was introduced in 2006 to increase the participation rate to 50% by 2020 (UNESCO, 2015: 685).

The economic reform from 1978 through the 1990s in China ushered in not only a high economic growth but also the evolvement of higher education from elite to mass, as education was for the first time linked to human resources strategy and was restored the position as the main channel to achieve one's individual aspirations. Like that in Malaysia, fast and fabulous growth of higher education was one important aspect of educational changes in this period. China started by a lowest participation rate between 2%-3% in the 1980s, and in 2001 it achieved a rate of 13%. However, China was still far left behind Malaysia that recorded 28% and a great many other countries in the same year (UNESCO 2003). Nevertheless, the year of 2004 saw the earlier fulfillment of the goal of participation rate of 15% by 2010, stipulated in the Action Plan for Revitalizing Education in the Twenty-first Century, 1999. In 2004, with a rate of 19%, over 20 million Chinese attended at the tertiary level (Zhou, 2004). Currently, Chinese higher education institutions, which amount to nearly 2900 in number, accommodated about 37 million students with a gross participation rate of 40% in 2015 (MOE, 2015a). This achievement has encouraged the Chinese government to set down even bolder prediction that by 2019 and onwards the tertiary-level participation rate in China will reach 50% or beyond (MOE, 2015a).

### *Structure*

Expansion brings with it increased differentiation (Altbach & Peterson, 1999: 9). The dramatic and continuous expansion has led to structural changes of higher education by ownership, funding source, academic focus and programme, etc. in the two countries. This

structural differentiation can be understood from the emergence of other types of postsecondary institution and the accelerated growth of private institutions.

In 2000, community colleges were established in Malaysia by the central government with the primary objective of providing alternative skill training and reeducation programmes for secondary school leavers and those who did not have formal education background. Besides, a number of public-financed polytechnics were set up to offer more industrially oriented programmes to cater to the demands of semi-professionals in engineering, commerce and services sectors. By 2008 Malaysia had 24 public polytechnics and 37 public community colleges located in all 13 states, with the exception of the Federal Territory (Tierney & Morshidi, 2008: 23). The ultimate aim for community colleges is to have one such life-long learning institution in every parliamentary district in Malaysia.

The establishment and operation of community colleges and open universities in China, for adult learners or local habitants pursuing diploma and certificate qualification or simply a more enriched life, however has been a local governmental effort. The start of community college movement in China was seen in Shanghai in the mid-1990s, and later community colleges were established in other parts of the country, propelled by the Chinese government's policy of promoting community education nationwide. Along the development of community colleges, a large open university system devoted to long-distance teaching and learning for adults was set up with the bulk of it at the Xian level. In general, these postsecondary life-long learning institutions offering diploma education and non-diploma Courses have multiplied in number since the 1990s and now count in thousands.

At the time of independence in Malaysia, private higher education institutions showed an earlier existence than public ones, as tutorial centers for transnational programmes that were geared to selected skills and professional qualifications (Tham, 2013: 66). It was not until the 1990s that private sector began experiencing really fast development, after then it was allowed by the state to initiate course or programme collaboration with foreign institutions of higher education, functioning as a main demand-absorber. And over the years, with far

greater size and equally important roles, private higher education in Malaysia has moved from being a demand absorbing support act to a major feature of the national higher education system (Loh, 2012: 4). In China, private higher education was dismantled and merged into the state-run system in the 1950s. In the early 1980s, private institutions were rebuilt under relevant incentive measures of the central authorities to help relieve the increasing demand pressure upon the public higher education. By 1999, the number of private institutions including those not authorized to offer degrees, bounced up to 1,270 (Cao & Levy, 2005: 14). The arising private sector has been designated as a complement to higher education system in this country. Despite this, by 2014 in China there have been 456 private institutions with the standing to offer degrees, including 9 branch campuses of foreign universities, with a student population close to 6 million (MOE, 2015b).

### **Autonomy: Privatization and Decentralization**

#### *Ownership*

In the arena of higher education, privatization occurs not only when there has emerged institutions based on non-state or private ownership, but also when the public sector has begun searching for non-governmental sources of funding. In both Malaysia and China, the diversity of funding bases has been one key feature of public universities.

With corporatization demands stipulated in the Universities and University Colleges (Amendment) Act of 1996, Malaysian public universities have been entitled to seeking non-government income. And thus one of the few unprecedented features of Malaysian public universities regarding their financial status in corporatization is that these institutions have all set up their respective companies, in the form of spin-offs or holdings, to generate sustainable non-government sources of income. Non-government income from consultancy, contract research, sale of expert services and other market-related activities is now part of the revenue for many public universities although the proportion is still small (Morshidi, 2006: 112). In this regard, corporatization has brought into public universities in Malaysia such market-based notions as resources, competition, consumers, efficiency, etc. and given rise to

strong quality assurance and accountability concerns.

In the Chinese context, privatization of public higher education is in two forms: the operation of affiliated colleges and public institutions' non-government income seeking. In 1989, public institutions of higher education in China started charging students tuition fees and other fees, and the rates varied according to costs of different fields of study. Also helpful to the increase of institution revenues are the market-oriented activities in either teaching programmes of continued education for adult learners or research projects for non-governmental sectors in return for financial profits, which have become increasingly common at public institutions, especially at those research-intensive universities. The affiliated colleges, which made their first appearance in 1999 in China and count currently about 300 in total number, are owned or managed by private parties (at least partially), classified by the higher education law as part of the private sector, and yet linked to public universities (Cao & Levy, 2005: 14). The emergence of these colleges indeed reflects the overload of public institutions throughout the 1990s and their longing to extend the privatization of the higher education provision.

### *Governance*

With privatization or diversification of funding sources, higher education is assumed to have more autonomy correspondingly, that is, a higher education institution has more power or authority to govern and make decision on its own affairs, staying off external interference, mostly from the government that bears gradually reduced allocations for higher education. On the part of government, this way of privatization will be functional a lot in making public universities more adaptive to the changing environment and become increasingly self-accounted in quality assurance by adding responsiveness and excellence into their activities. Over years of development, corporate managerialism with performance-driven culture has become an increasingly evident feature in corporatized universities in Malaysia (Lee, 2004: 69).

While allowed to exercise market-related income-generating activities and self-regulation power, Malaysian public universities, in the process of corporatization, have been granted

some degree of autonomy in areas of institutional governance, academic governance, financial management and human resource management. For priority disciplines and research focuses, undergraduate and postgraduate fields of study, programme designing, staff management, etc., which had once been much intervened by the Ministry of Education and the succeeding Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysian public universities have demonstrated more self-regulating power and self-accountability. The designated five research universities are reported to have claimed full autonomy status even.

It sounded familiarly in Chinese higher education when the trend of privatization or entrepreneurialism was prominent and exerting strong impact. Based on the existing hierarchical structure of higher education, universities and colleges in China have been granted by the state different degrees of power to pursue their own agenda, with a handful nation's elite universities, like Peking, Tsinghua, Zhejiang, having more self decision-making authority. With the decentralization of power from the state to institutions, there has been devolution of some of the authority from the centre to the regions (provinces and major cities), as municipal governments are allowed to provide a growing proportion of the public allocation for institutions of higher education located in their administrative regions, and subsequently to poses more governing power in the localized development of higher education.

#### *National-level Regulatory Framework*

Between 1996 and 1997, five watershed pieces of legislation relating to higher education were passed by the Malaysian Parliament, providing a regulatory framework for the establishing and running of private sector and public university management (Mukherjee & Wong, 2011: 133). The Education Act, 1996 dictates that private sector is one integral part of national higher education of Malaysia and the state has supreme authority in matters of tertiary education. The Universities and University Colleges (Amendment) Act, 1996 and the Private Higher Education Act, 1996 ascertain diversified or marketised sources of income for Malaysian universities and some sort of loosened pattern of administration at public higher education by corporatization. The latter act functions as the strict state parameters for the

establishment, maintenance and quality development of private higher education. Responding to the incessant call for qualitative development of higher education, the National Accreditation Board Act, 1996 stipulated the general academic criteria and formed the basis of a quality assurance system of private sector of higher education, and later it helped develop the Malaysian Qualifications Framework. These national laws concerning higher education are enacted to help Malaysia evolve into an education hub of excellence in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, and are part of Vision 2020 action plan to ensure Malaysia's future status as a fully developed nation state (Tan, 2002).

The dramatic changes with the running of higher education in China, especially in the areas of finance, ownership and governance since the early 1990s had been in close alignment with several directives on higher education reform enacted by the Chinese Ministry of Education (the former State Education Commission) and the State Council of the Chinese government during that period of time, the main sprits of which were later translated into national laws pertaining to education. The Opinions on Accelerating the Reform and Development of Higher Education, 1992 pointed out the necessity of installment of a new system of higher education governance, with the state responsible for strategic planning and macro-management, and the institutions given management autonomy (Morgan & Li, 2015). The Chinese Education Reform and Development Compendium, 1993 for the first time allowed for fee-charging activities for public higher education and introduced a cost-sharing notion among the public universities then. All these initiatives were reflected in Higher Education Law, 1998, endorsing privatization and decentralization of Chinese higher education.

### **International Integration: Globalization and Internationalization**

#### *Cross-border Outreach*

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is magnifying a globalization theme that nations around the world have been so closely linked with each other that they are becoming an integrated one. Upon this fundamental reality, educational institutions, especially institutions of higher education, have



the urge from inside that a global citizenship and the necessary skills to fit in that new identity should be embedded and enhanced through teaching and learning at schools, so that graduates are able to live and work in an increasingly globalised world, hence the trend that universities and colleges from different countries and regions form a profound global community in various forms of inter-communication across national borders. These cross-border outreaches in the arena of higher education have been strengthened much by the fast development of information and communications technology (ICT) and the emergence of an international knowledge network with the English language as the dominant language medium.

In this global community of higher education, developing countries with differentiated stages of higher education development indicated by Trow's gross participation rates (Trow, 1972) have had their own consideration of priority strategy. As for Malaysia and China, with a mass higher education since the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, internationalization and globalization are more a reflection of the other major trends noted above in providing higher education and accordingly have become more prominent strategies stipulated in the national blueprints of higher education and national development plans which address the challenges of the present and future. As Malaysia has achieved a status of higher education hub of excellence in the Southeast Asia region (Abd Rahman, 2012: 291), it is not uncommon that Malaysian universities, private ones in particular, incorporate global horizons and international dimension in their main functions, prioritizing internationalization and demonstrating a global market orientation. This is also the case with Chinese universities and colleges that have been increasingly driven by the quest for international competitiveness. A recent survey among institutions of higher education in Beijing reveals, that more than 80% of the institutions surveyed claim internationalization in the mission statement, close to 90% have set up an ad hoc unit for international affairs with regular financial support (Jin & Wen, 2013: 7). This trend in Beijing is actually common elsewhere in China, and the cross-border organizational activities are gaining more prominence at the institutional level, partly in response to the growing internal quality control and self-accountability along the fast expansion, partly a result of the institutional implementation of the central or municipal

government strategic plan of internationalization of higher education.

### *The Two-way Outreach in Malaysia*

The New Economic Policy period ended in Malaysia in 1990, due to the facts that the main socio-economic objectives of this ethnic equity-driven policy were not fully achieved yet complaints and dissatisfactions of the non-Malay population were piling up. Former Prime Minister Mohamad Mahathir's paper, entitled "Malaysia: The Way Forward", which was submitted to the Malaysian Business Council in 1991, came to guide Malaysia in a new way to achieve fully industrialized status by 2020. The vision identified nine strategic challenges, the gist of which is the building of Malaysia into a united, more open, tolerant, liberal and progressive nation that is able to prosper and grow more competitive in an era of globalization (Saad, 2012). In this transformation process, Malaysians have been called to be citizens intimate with their national origins and identity, adaptive and knowledgeable, with sense of originality, credibility and innovativeness. These tasks, translated into feasible mission statements of national plans, indicate that education, higher education sector in particular, should take the lead in achieving these national goals (Subramani, 2000: 149).

In the frameworks of national development built on Vision 2020, "education hub" has emerged as a core concept regarding Malaysian educational aspiration and the path to it, reiterated as either "regional hub", "regional centre" or "international hub" in the National Plans after 1996 and National Higher Education Strategic Plan in 2007, as well as in media reports and institutional mission statements. Whatever the name, the vision of a higher education hub in Asia and beyond has been sustained and instilled in Malaysia over in the years since. This hub vision, an indispensable part of Vision 2020, is structured into a dual-track path to realize as an education importer and an education exporter as well in a long term.

Since the 1990s, under the stewardship and backup of the Malaysian government, there has been continuous importation of education services from overseas, especially from western countries headed by UK, USA, and Australia, through various forms of bilateral or

multilateral collaboration. As a result, the availability of internationally-linked tertiary programmes at Malaysian universities has been enormous. Take cross-border higher education involving UK and Malaysian institutions for example, for historical reasons, the Malaysia–UK relationship has been the longest among all Malaysia’s education relationships with foreign countries (Hill et al., 2014: 953), and a survey conducted between 2010 to 2011 revealed that by that period of time there were altogether 239 transnational programmes. Offered by 78 Malaysian institutions of higher education in collaboration with 35 UK institutions (Hill et al., 2014: 955).

Parallel to the importing of overseas higher education from joint programmes to branch campuses of foreign universities, Malaysia has successfully reached a status of world renowned regional student hub (Knight & Morshidi, 2011) as a provider of international higher education. This has been achieved due to the Malaysian government’s dedicated efforts in strengthening Malaysian higher education competitive edge in global student market by means of cooperating with overseas institutions of higher education, mostly the ones from western countries, and championing Malaysia’s international education brand. International students from neighboring countries as well as from the Muslim-dominant part of the African region are attracted to Malaysia to pursue their studies for either Malaysian degrees or western degrees yet at much lower cost. Since the 1990s, Malaysia-based providers of higher education, private ones in particular, have also begun to expand their presence internationally. Some key examples include Limkokwing University of Creative Technology (LUCT) and Asia Pacific Institute of Information Technology (APIIT). LUCT first expanded with the establishment of a branch in London, UK, then began to aggressively expand its presence with branch campuses in Southeast Asia (mostly in Indonesia and Cambodia) and in Africa (mainly in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland). APIIT is another local institution that has gone global. It began with a focus on IT education and training and expanded within the South Asian region with the establishment of campuses in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India.

To sum up, under the scheme of education hub, Malaysia’s importation of overseas higher

education has been facilitating its exporting of its local higher education as an indispensable condition since the initiation of the great hub project, while exports of Malaysia-based education services in turn propels the importing of overseas education services, hence a virtuous cycle taking effect.

### *The Two-way Outreach in China*

Since the adoption of the open-up policy in the late 1970s, China's detachment from Soviet-style higher education speeded up, and at the same time the national authorities' interest in encouraging Chinese to learn from western higher education arose steadfastly. This was reinforced by the enactment of the Chinese government's Directive in 1978 to increase the state quota in overseas education and training sponsored by Chinese government scholarships. This educational directive in 1978 and the subsequently continuous outflow of Chinese people in the decades that followed to have their tertiary studies or cooperative research in western countries marked the beginning of China to turn into the largest sending country in the world.

From 1978 to 2012, nearly 2.65 million Chinese in total went to study outside Mainland China (Shao, 2013). The single year of 2014 saw about 46 thousand Chinese leaving Mainland China to have tertiary education, an increase of 11% since 2013 (DET, 2016). Besides this sizeable student and staff mobility outbound, the bringing of overseas higher education elements into China by means of offering distinguished chair professorships or guest professorships to non-Chinese world renowned academics, and establishing cross border cooperative relationships, has been another prominent aspect of China as an education importer since the 1980s. From the setting up of Nanjing University-based Sino-American Center for Cultural Studies in the late 1980s as the earliest practice of "Sino-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools"(hereinafter as SFCRS) till 2012, roughly 1900 SFCRS-related programmes, schools and institutions have been approved by the Chinese government (Shao, 2013).

While importing services of higher education from overseas, China is building its image as an

emerging contender at international students market, a host country in fast growth. In 1950, Tsinghua University received the first group of 33 international students all from East European countries, which represented the beginning of international student education in China after national liberation (Dong & Chapman, 2008). In 2014, approximately 38 thousand international students were studying in China, a 5.8% increase on 2013 (DET, 2016). More than 700 higher education institutions across the country were authorized by the Chinese government to receive international students for either pursuing academic degrees or taking non-award courses. This inbound student's mobility started to grow in force along with China's rising interest in outbound programme mobility and institution mobility. So far still limited with the commercial presence, the overseas educational outreach of Chinese higher education has been largely developed through the establishment of non-profit Confucius Institutes throughout the world for promoting Chinese language and culture abroad. By 2014, Chinese Confucius Institutes numbered 475 with the existence of an additional 851 Confucius Classrooms located in 126 countries worldwide (Neubauer & Zhang, 2015: 4).

## **Major Findings and Concluding Remarks**

### *The Quantitative Development of Higher Education*

For the last two decades in Malaysia and China, fast and sustained economic growth has provided great momentum for higher education capacity building and human resources development. Demand for higher education in either Malaysia or China grew steadfastly due to such common push factors as strong economic growth, tertiary aged cohort increase supported by the fast urban population growth and nearly universal participation in primary and secondary education. As a result, higher education in Malaysia and China expanded dramatically since the 1990s, and the two countries experienced a remarkable transition from elite to mass higher education, and are now striving to reach the universal access. This process has been speeded up by the rising private provision of higher education, which was envisioned and boosted by the state in the 1990s, and this trend has more profound demonstration in Malaysia as the capacity development of public sector was not sufficient. Contrastingly, in China the capacity of existing public institutions of higher education was

sufficiently enlarged through institutional mergers that had most frequent occurrence between the end of the 1990s and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Another shared concurrence concerning structural changes of higher education in Malaysia and China is that polytechnic education, life-time education for adults offering leisure courses, job training and retraining programmes of flexible character, were planned to meet the complex demands of the modern population. This was reflected in the wide spread emergence of community colleges, polytechnics, open universities, adult and continuing education programs, and distance learning programs. However, in Malaysia new tertiary-level providers of this kind are supported and managed by the national government, while local engagement has been dominant in China.

### *The Running of Higher Education*

To meet the demand for more access to higher education while easing the public fiscal pressure, diversified funding and private ownership were strongly favored in the two countries' higher education-related strategies. This led to the size expansion of private higher education and the growing public-sector privatization from the 1990s onwards. However, in China, private institutions as a subsector of higher education are valued as a complement to the public sector; accordingly they are expected to only deserve an inferior position when it comes to strategy and policy setting, financial support, as well as quality control. The Private Education Law, 2005 actually is not designed to help change but enhance this status. Contrastingly, Malaysian private institutions of higher education not only grew to be the main part of national higher education by size, but also enjoy strategic positions as the main force in Malaysia's achieving universal system of higher education and the main sector to absorb in international students in building a global student hub. Consequently, there has been closer state steering and scrutiny over quantity for the private institutions, as reflected from the higher education-related acts noted above and the so-called "ministerialisation" principle exercised, in which the minister of higher education has the decisive authority in such private higher education-related affairs as the establishment, curricula designing and the use of instruction language (Tan, 2002).

Behind all these practices of diversification and privatization in Malaysia and China is a shared trend of decentralization of power in higher education from the state to institutions, which allows for marketisation of higher education to some extent and greater flexibility of higher education institutions to respond to the needs of socio-economic development. In Malaysia, this trend of decentralization grew out of the practices of corporatization at public universities began in the 1990s. In the mean time, private institutions experienced even stricter accreditation. Likewise in China, issues concerning power reallocation were put on the pressing agenda of higher education reform, and subsequently more autonomy has been granted by the state to public universities in certain areas, such as finance and internal governance, etc. The infiltration of neoliberalism and New Public Management into government operation could offer the common theoretical ground and rationale for higher education decentralization and marketisation in Malaysia and China. Nevertheless, a notable distinction with the practice of decentralization in the Chinese context is that the Chinese government has also devolved some power of higher education to the provinces and major cities, hence a state-provincial-institutional engagement in deed, while in Malaysia it is just a state-institutional structure of decentralization.

Some noteworthy similarity concerning the overall scenarios of the running of higher education in Malaysia and China is that there were a series of state laws, directives pertaining to higher education privatization and decentralization enacted in the 1990s, hence the emergence of a national-level regulatory framework for new patterns of higher education finance and power allocation.

### *The Qualitative Development of Higher Education*

Upon entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with vibrant economic growth and a proportion of student's participation at the tertiary level approaching 50%, Malaysia and China are showing a greater concern over the qualitative aspect of higher education development. This shared tendency in higher education is well reflected in Malaysian national plans to grow into a fully industrialized country with high global competitiveness and in China's ambitious dream to

reestablish its position as a world leader in science, technology and education. Along this gradual shift of focus from quantity to quality, internationalization of higher education has become one important aspect of modernization of Malaysia and that of China, and internationalization is more of an underlying theme for quality building of higher education at both the national level and institutional level. At both levels, Malaysians and Chinese have an increasing awareness of the challenges and opportunities brought about for higher education by the era of globalization, and are making endeavors to reach these ends from their own standpoints. At the same time the two national higher education systems have been following the accepted principles, norms, and standards of a global community of higher education to better integrate into it.

At the institutional level, where the real process of internationalization is taking place (Knight, 2004: 7), generally organizational activities in Malaysian universities and Chinese universities have quite similar reflections in the commitment-making and the infrastructure building in ad hoc units and regular financial support system. Academic activities, such as internationalization of curricula, student and staff mobility inbound and outbound, twinning programs, credit transfer programs, external degree programs as well as institution mobility in the form of branch campus have had equally important treatment, in which Malaysia universities claim an earlier start and have relatively more matured ideas and practices devoted to this area.

Allowed to use English as the main instruction language, private universities and university colleges in Malaysia are more internationalized by having much larger proportion of international students than public universities, whose foreign enrolment has been capped at 5% of students at undergraduate level, with Malay as the main instruction language. However, at the postgraduate level, it is the public universities, especially the five research universities that are far more internationalized by having a very international composition of student population, so is the same with research, whose internationally-linked programmes outnumber the private universities a lot. Unlike that in Malaysia, public institutions of higher education in China are the sole practitioners of internationalization, while private institutions



took no part in it, preoccupied with the struggle for survival.

The noteworthy similarity from the macro perspective then is that the cross-border outreach in Malaysian and Chinese higher education is two-way in character, namely, on the one hand, Malaysia and China are currently among the major education importers in the world, on the other, they are transforming themselves into competitive education exporters in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

### *Concluding Remarks*

This overview of higher education development over the last two decades in Malaysia and China is organized across three inter-related dimensions that frame this comparative approach. Suggested by ADB in its overall study of higher education changes in Asia as most notable (ADB, 2011: 5), quantity development, which occurred first, characterized higher education development in the two countries during the 1990s with continuous access expansion, and laid down a diversified structure. Great success in massification of higher education in Malaysia and China brought up a series of fundamental issues for operation of higher education, concerning programme flexibility, governance, finance and institutional ownership, etc. In the two countries, these issues were commonly addressed through employment of new/improved mechanisms, namely, market mechanisms advocating private ownership and resources competition and the corresponding New Public Management mechanisms in the governance of public sector. As Malaysia and China are striving toward highly modernized economy in an era of globalization, their serious endeavors are in large part reflected in their integration into a global community of established/obligatory norms and standards. Under these circumstances, quality, instead of quantity and any other issues, is on the more pressing agenda of national higher education development in Malaysia and China in the long run. Accordingly, cross-border outreach or collaboration in higher education, as the core step of integrating into the global community of higher education, has been positioned as the first path that deserves new attention to raising quality (ADB, 2011: 5).

Therefore, for Malaysians and Chinese, underlying the array of their higher education reform

efforts aimed at quantity and quality over the last two decades are the two ultimate concerns with equity and excellence for higher education. Although these two concerns might have been parallel in certain periods of time, they need to be viewed in a chronological order. While the considerations with equity-driven quantitative development, reflected through endeavors in basification and diversification of higher education, were dominant in the 1990s, the concern with excellence has developed into the major theme for the present and the upcoming future, addressed through effective cross-border outreach in higher education in the first place. So the overall development of higher education in Malaysia and China could be viewed as a progression from quantity to quality, with market-related rules or principles pertaining to democratization, privatization and decentralization introduced to improve the existing mechanisms and establish new ones to reach the ends designed.

In theory, these rules or principles would assume a greater degree of academic autonomy and a shift of state's role from control to supervision as the proportion of public spending in higher education decreases, which could result in more autonomy and responsiveness to market needs on the part of institutions. However, now either in Malaysia or in China, the running of higher education, with the new/changed mechanisms functioning, has not demonstrated a substantial change away from the past status, for the nation state/central government still covers relatively larger part of the cost of higher education through more varied forms of public financing whereby the state/central government can still exert its controlling influence over the running of higher education system. For a large part of public institutions in Malaysia and China, market-oriented activities have not been mature yet and thus have not worked out many expected benefits. They remain counting on governmental resources in particular. This is especially true with Malaysian public sector. With global hub initiatives progressing, the Malaysian government has enhanced its investments in public universities, the five designated research universities in particular. At least in the first decade of the 21st century, the Malaysian government provided 90 per cent of funding to public higher education institutions on an average basis through budget allocation each year (Abd Rahman and Farley, 2013: 4). Generally the Malaysian government's allocation for operating activities of public higher education increases in percentage terms, and it is for this reason

that public universities in Malaysia are not yet free from the “shackles of bureaucratic regulation” (Morshidi, 2006: 111). With more investments from the state, it remains to be seen how much power a vice chancellor and the faculty have and how free they are to set the direction for an institution (Tierney & Morshidi, 2008: 24) under this “centralized decentralization” (Lee, 2006: 149).

A very similar situation of closer state steering or control through more financial investments is found in China, as the Chinese government pours even more financial resources into higher education sector and keeps the key higher education institutions, top-tier ones in particular, under a structure of greater state steering and scrutiny through various national-level projects of higher education, such as “Project 211”, ”Project 985”, “Project 2011” and the latest “Project Double First-rate”, and subsequently the government-university relationship remains largely top-down with financial and directive means used simultaneously.

In this connection, in spite of emerging corporatization or similar market-related notions and practices, the state steering and control is more of a fixed variable in the evolution of higher education system in both Malaysia and China, from mass to universal access, and from quantitative emphasis to qualitative focus. This feature of higher education development could possibly be explained with authoritarian neoliberalism, a variation of neoliberalism exercised mostly in Southeast and East Asia with Malaysia and China being typical cases, where dominance of strict top-down management in public arena does not change substantially. Therefore, it should be noted that issues of internationalization, internal governance, quality assurance, marketisation, entrepreneurialism, etc., should be more worth exploring when it comes to research on Malaysian higher education or Chinese higher education or a comparative analysis, as these studies would reveal from one way or another, in the context of rising knowledge-based economy, with the state still residing in the controlling authority, the actual ways by which higher education system functions and improves its competitive edge in the market and responsiveness to the changing environment.

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