BOOK REVIEW

Internationalization of Higher Education in East Asia

Internationalization of Higher Education in East Asia - Trends of student mobility and impact on education governance, Edited by Ka Ho Mok & Kar Ming Yu, London & New York: Routledge, 251 pages, 2014, ISBN: 9780415705035

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Ever since the General Agreement on Trade in Services was ratified in 1995, member states have committed to considering higher education as a service to be traded rather than as a common good and to remove obstacles to trading (Phillipson forthcoming). Higher education, by consequence, is increasingly viewed as a commodity, which has paved the way for international benchmarking and global university ranking systems in which universities compete for the brightest and best students and staff from a global pool of candidates (Hazelkorn 2011). Indeed, "competition has become a central preoccupation of the higher education subsector" (Portnoi et al. 2010: 1).

The book reviewed here is concerned with two inter-related consequences of such transformations: 1) the quest for regional education hubs, and 2) the expansion of transnational higher education. The regional focus is on Asia, which in many ways leads the way in these two areas. It offers a critical exploration of the consequences of these changes and compares them across some selected Asian countries.

To readers largely unfamiliar with "education hubs" and "transnational higher education", an education hub may be described as a designated amalgamation of knowledge-producing activities intended to make a region or country competitive vis-à-vis the global market, attract foreign investment, and provide high-quality education for both local and international students. Examples include the Dubai Silicon Oasis, the Kuala Lumpur Education City and Singapore's Global Schoolhouse.

Transnational higher education, in turn, refers to education provision by one country offered in another. Well-known examples for European readers include the Universities of Nottingham's and Liverpool's campuses in China.

The book is organised into twelve chapters as well as an introduction by the editors.

Chapter 1 sets the scene and introduces the concepts of education hubs and transnational higher education. It also provides a very useful overview of the socio-political background of the main countries treated in more depth in the book: Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, China, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea. It describes the chapters of the volume as being "set out against the wider policy context briefly discussed above to examine how Asian countries have responded to the growing pressure of globalization in recruiting, retaining and attracting talents by investing more in human resources development" (Ka Ho Mok & Kar Ming Yu 2014: 16).

Chapter 2 by Jane Knight provides an excellent overview of the history and typology of education hubs. It then outlines some useful definitions and key concepts before it compares the approaches adopted to education hubs in six national contexts.

Chapter 3 by Ada Lai and Rupert Maclean tracks how the Hong Kong government, despite priding itself on its non-interventionist economic policy, has tried to build an education hub and the kinds of problems it has encountered along the way.

Chapter 4 by Kong Chong Ho and Yum Ge tackles the question of how and whether education hubs manage to retain their human capital and what factors are involved in this. More specifically, what factors contribute to making knowledge workers stay in or leave a city like Singapore?

Chapter 5 by Sheng-Ju Chan explores cross-border educational collaboration between Taiwan and China, its positive effects, as well as its negative, notably "brain-drain" from Taiwan to China. Strikingly, such negative outcomes are the exact opposite of what collaboration agreements have sought to promote, an observation which exposes important tensions between rhetoric and reality.

Chapter 6 by Anthony R. Welch and Jie Hao focuses on the job-seeking experiences of high-skilled returnees to China, thereby linking in with the theme of the previous chapter. The authors highlight reintegration challenges for the returnees in a fast-changing China.

Chapter 7 by Kok Chung Ong and David Kin Keung Chan explores the implications of transnational higher education on university governance. Unsurprisingly perhaps, operating across national contexts and jurisdictions may pose significant operational challenges, related to such issues as program approval, quality assurance and discrepancies in regulated form and actual practice.

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Chapter 8 by Ka Ho Mok, Kar Ming Yu and Alfred Muluan Wu consider and contrast the internationalization of higher education in Malaysia and South Korea. They present and discuss findings from a project examining student evaluation and their learning experience.

Chapter 9 by John N. Hawkins and Jing Xu widens the perspective and considers how mobility and migration paves the way to the innovative university, focusing on the entire Asia-Pacific region.

Chapter 10 by Akiyoshi Yonezawa, Kenji Ishida and Hugo Horta, considering the long-term internationalization of higher education in Japan, presents the findings of a survey of non-Japanese faculty members in Japanese universities. It considers such factors as their incentive for entry into Japan, their perceived career opportunities vis-à-vis Japanese faculty and their intentions of staying in Japan.

Chapter 11 by Dorothy I-ru Chen ties in with the brain-drain theme of chapter 5 by exploring how Taiwanese higher education institutions historically started implementing off-shore educational hubs primarily in China, and later also in Vietnam and Thailand. The author predicts challenges for this practice, notably because the teaching would have to be delivered in English – not the first language of the local population – which the author suggests could compromise its quality.

In chapter 12, Li-chun Chiang, raises some interesting dilemmas faced by transnational higher education in East Asia. The author starts out by making the important observation that transnational higher education is still mainly coming from the West to the East, and some of the challenges faced by the latter include quality assurance frameworks, how to handle allegations of cultural imperialism, how to transfer a pre-packed curriculum, and how to manage staffing issues and so forth.

In the final chapter, Brian D. Denman provides a highly useful typology of transnational co-operations. He also embarks on the complex task of teasing apart processes of globalization and internationalization, and takes the reader through some theoretical stances on globalization, e.g. the extent to which it engenders standardization and homogenization, cultural imperialism, economic convergence, economic opportunity, and so on.

This volume, written by leading scholars in the field of educational development and policy studies, is a fascinating and critical account of how Asian governments and universities have responded to the growing challenges of globalization. There is a strong focus, particularly in the first half of the book on transnational human capital, migration and recruitment, but the scope is broadened by the content in the other chapters. The chapters are clearly written and well-organized and the introduction provides a very useful synthesis of the book chapters. The book will be an essential resource for policy makers, researchers and postgraduates concerned with higher education, internationalization, Asian and international education.

The focus is distinctly on the macro rather than the micro level. The reader is provided with a thorough account of the national and institutional policies and the economic factors driving transnational education in Asia. This means that for readers interested in how these political changes affect the individuals, there is less to find. So too for those interested in new technological media and distance-learning education, which despite its obvious relevance to transnational education are not discussed in any depth. Another omission is the linguistic and educational consequences of these transformations which, with the exception of Ka Ho Mok et al.'s and I-ru Chen's contributions do not ask how learning and teaching takes place when it is delivered in a language which is not one's first.

These are minor and unfair quibbles, however, because the purpose of the book is clearly not to provide an in-depth account of the micro level. Moreover, if anything has been neglected in the growing literature on the internationalization of higher education it is the political decisions leading to it. In its own right, then, this book provides a fascinating, insightful and highly readable account of the dramatic changes faced in the Asian – and global – higher education system and the political decision involved in them.

References

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