THF Working Paper

ASIAN PERSPECTIVES ON COMPARATIVE SYSTEMS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Reflections on Preliminary Findings in the Context of Asian Knowledge Building

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Abstract

This short paper is a brief review of two bodies of information related to the evolution of the role of education in societal progress as it might be relevant in Asia. The two bodies of information are (a) a literature review carried out beginning with the work of sixty respected researchers on current issues in education theory and practice, and (b) a series of ethnographic interviews conducted in Asia with sixty respondents mainly specialist education practitioners, but also employers and students and government officials. Issues discussed are: globalization, internationalization, massification, systems of evaluation, research, the knowledge economy, marketization, technology, and organizational autonomy. Four issues specific to Asia are then defined: the question of what constitutes knowledge; the possibility of more benevolent societal domination; the teaching role; and whether high performance is based on general or specific knowledge. Advice is offered about the use of a complex adaptive systems approach in research on such topics.

Introduction

This working paper is written as a deliberately very brief and summarizing guide to key issues affecting higher education in Asia, and relating to wider global trends. It is intended to set the scene for other more specific studies. It is informed by a literature survey and by a series of interviews carried out on the general topic to gather information, opinion, and a sense of trends, from people directly involved in action as educators, employers, policy makers concerned with human capital, and also students in the educational process. These interviews were conducted in Hong Kong, China, Japan, and Thailand, as well as Singapore.

An opportunity was taken in parallel to review the main literature in the field of higher education, and the work of 61 authors was identified as being of particular significance.[1] An annotated bibliography summarizing the contents of their work is in a separate document in the HEAD collection (Working Paper 47/2014), and that work is the main basis for the first part of this summarizing paper. It outlines the set of themes that appear significant to some of the major scholars currently working on the condition of higher education globally. A simple list of the author names is given at Appendix A. This work was supplemented by a series of 60 interviews in Hong Kong, China, Japan, Thailand and Singapore, with a range of specialists in the field of education. These discussions during December 2013 pursued local interpretations of the issues that emerged from the literature. The research method was exploratory and asked the respondents to identify the three most significant challenges in education as they experienced it currently; and then to open up a discussion on those issues. This paper contains a summary of main themes from those conversations and a consideration of certain Asian perspectives on those themes. Appendix B lists the interviewees and provides a summary of the main points of commentary.

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[1] We are grateful here for the guidance of David Musson at Oxford University Press in a conversation on this topic. Prior work by Richard Whitley on systems of education had also provided valuable stimulus. Discussions with Bruce Johnstone at Buffalo were also most helpful.

The theory context is that arguably the processes of researching complex societal systems have tended to begin with examples from the western world, and later to extend to other areas such as Asia in a second wave. Much of the parallel theory of comparative business systems was built on comparisons between countries in the west and then extended later into Asia beginning with the work of Whitley (1992), and only more recently expanding with new comparative empirical studies (e.g. Witt and Redding 2014). This is not to say that research was entirely absent in Asia. It is to say that the emergence of general theory straddling different regions was not the main purpose of the Asian research. So too in theorizing education, the lead appears to have been taken by western scholars when it comes to general theory, although exceptions to this such as Dore (1997, 2010) and Li (2012) must be acknowledged. A question then arises as to whether there are Asian dimensions relevant to the emerging theory of higher education systems.

Recurring global themes

The literature survey which assists in answering this question is summarized as ten recurring themes that are the initial focuses of attention in this paper. They are discussed here without any implied priority or weighting. Note that these are global issues. They make up what an observer would describe as the environment of higher education insofar as it might impinge directly on almost any university regardless of location. The relevant literature, rather than being cited here point by point, is available in a separate HEAD Working paper 47/2014 (Annotated Bibliography of the Literature on Education in Societal Development).

Globalization

Globalization (as distinct from Internationalization) is the spreading of specific ways of doing things into the world at large for more or less universal application. An example would be rankings. Another would be accreditation, and another would be work towards standardization under the auspices of bodies such as the UN, OECD etc. Related to this is often a political agenda supporting education in a broad sense as a crucial component of empowerment when countries attempt to re-balance their social structures. The rapid opening of communications has made for higher consciousness of the opportunities made available via education, and of the practical mechanisms for gaining access to it. Universities find themselves now more open to scrutiny, but also to both opportunity and competitive threat in various forms.

Projections of globally mobile student numbers see a figure of 7 million by 2015, having been 2.1 million in 2012. The cover story of The Economist for March 28 2015 was 'The whole world is going to university'. Despite a constant rise in tuition fees the trend has benefitted especially the US, UK, Canada and Australia. Representing the flow of institutions the UAE has had one third of its higher education institutions come in from abroad. Certain problems have surfaced: the fear of brain drains, and anxiety about individual safety in some destinations. There is also resistance to the inevitable homogenization of curricula across societies, and concern at the ascendancy of the English language. Some cultures are sensitive to the concessions made in this process as their own ideals become submerged, and

as externally determined rankings drive much of the process. Some alleviation of this latter pressure was achieved with China's sponsoring of the respected Shanghai University Global Rankings system. But rankings remain controversial as their methodologies remain suspect for many, even though their simplicity is magnetic for consumers.

Internationalization

Internationalized education is an outcome of globalization. The most obvious actions are the movements out from a home country of both institutions and students. Other forms include alliances between institutions, new networks for the sharing of degree teaching, credit transfer systems, a floating labour force of teachers, and a franchising of qualifications mechanisms usually below degree level. Three features have combined to stimulate this fast-growing trend: the globalizing of industry and of travel; the increasing financial pressures on first-world universities with the consequent search for new sources of revenue; and rising awareness among families in developing countries of the labour market significance of foreign degrees. Much migration is an extension of this same logic as foreign studies are used to gain footholds for subsequent immigration.

Massification

The massification of higher education is associated with new forms of communications technology, and with rising aspirations. Where degree teaching can be highly codified, it can be distributed widely through methods other than face-to-face teaching. In these initiatives the forces of market choice come into play and cause attention to be paid to retaining motivation and achievement within the pedagogy. Very low completion rates are reported in MOOCs (mass open online courses), and low acceptance in the labour market. Within more standard universities parallel experiments are taking place, as with 'flipped classrooms', or student–centred learning, or post-lecture blogging, and distance learning. The theme behind most of these changes is the scaling up of access to good teachers without losing sight of them entirely. For some this means a crisis of the professoriate. The challenge of a universally felt student need for teacher contact and exchange, and a high correlation between that need being met and academic performance especially in subjects requiring judgement as opposed to memory, remains in the background as universities adjust their cost structures

Systems of Evaluation

Within this category is included the widespread influence of student-centred (or problem-based) learning. Traditional teacher-centred learning tends in many contexts to descend into rote learning, with its related limitations. The student-centred approach reflects a rise in ideals of empowerment more broadly. It also takes influence from a rear-guard action to preserve the civilizing influence of the arts and humanities, fields that tend to rely on the inculcation of individual critical faculties, creativity, and civic consciousness.

Systems of evaluation now commonly involve shared result scores, and are designed to inculcate the social skills needed for this to be possible without friction or free loading. These social skills are seen as valuable in new kinds of work context.

The massification initiatives noted above bring with them their own evaluation challenges, with much experimentation going on to counter the negatives of mechanized marking with the positives of collective evaluation. Issues of legitimacy of the end result, and so of institutional reputation and esteem for the diploma, remain problematic.

Research

Research remains as always a primary marker for a good university. It remains also a symbol of university financial power, as its costs rise and as funding agencies tend to encourage concentration and/or clustering. Common outcomes are larger research teams and longer projects. Changes vary worldwide but certain consistent patterns are visible. The most obvious trends are the concentration of 'big science' in national facilities that act as cluster centres, larger and longer projects. Second is the move towards more demanding accountability for research relevance. Debates about goal displacement challenge - but find it hard to dislodge - the increasing power of the financial hierarchy. The traditional balance of teaching and research is often lost in favour of research. Industry imposes more of its own agenda. The factory-like ethos encroaches on the earlier ways of doing things.

At the same time the world of research is revolutionized by new forms of data handling and communications, especially in the form of the 'big data' responses to exploding storage and processing capacity. Libraries are re-designed. New media proliferate. New sources of legitimate scholarly output are established and penetrate more widely.

The Knowledge Economy

The generally increasing intensity of competition in economies has combined with an increase in levels of education, to produce forms of both organizing and market action that rest on more sophisticated information handling, and so of knowledge. Much of daily life is now conducted with reliance on things going on invisibly but with crucial reliability. Such would not be possible without two contributions from education: the codifying and diffusing of the necessary knowledge; and the standardizing and accrediting of its acquisition. The process spills over into the work of professional bodies and of technical skilling at pre-degree level. Professionalizing is strong in the western tradition, but relatively weaker in many Asian societies. Vocational training is strong in mainland Europe but relatively weak elsewhere. But overall the role of higher education in societies is constantly strengthened with the rise in reliance on the predictability of knowledge possession. This does not provide a solution to the more subtle knowledge needs fostered by fields such as the arts and humanities, the expression of which is often less powerful and by fewer people.

Marketization

The problem posed by marketization for universities relates to their prime reasons for existence (Nussbaum 2012). The market in this case is essentially the labour market

but that is a reflection of larger forces of economic logic that are taken in some societies as prior to alternative philosophies about 'the good society' that may have wide appeal without wide up-front endorsement. In some cases, such as France, the welfare alternative to the market is more clearly endorsed, but its effect on French global reputation in higher education has been negative, except in small elite institutions. The essential tension is that between the left and right wing political positions, and universities might find themselves victims of shifts along that spectrum, as with the arrival from the right of New Public Management.

The market interest is predictably based in employability, and so comes to be expressed in a concern with skills and knowledge of direct use. Although some of these capabilities might be defined in terms such as ability to think for oneself, or broad-mindedness, or creativity, it is only at the societal level that deeper capacities come to be specifically valued as desired outcomes. In many countries these appear now to compete disadvantageously with the demands of the commercial market. Debates centre around a suspect commodification in the interests of consumerism rather than scholarship. In such cases the role of universities in the social fabric may be shifting in a direction with long-term consequences.

Technology

In a sector where the primary throughput is information exchange, the primary output is knowledge, and the main resource the library (or its equivalent), the essential technology is that surrounding communications.

We have noted earlier the impact of communications technology on massification and evaluation. Here we simply add the significant fact of the generational change in behaviour associated with those born in the new communications age. Although it is arguable that certain desired outcomes remain unchanged: ability to present an argument; accumulated understanding; critical judgement; aesthetic sensibility; social skills: there has nonetheless been a seismic shift in the process of acquiring, sharing and expressing knowledge. Information and knowledge have both undergone major changes in immediacy, reach, breadth, social inclusion, focussing capacity, and variety of access. In the teaching and learning process parallel changes have taken place in student/ teacher involvement, in work sharing, in modes of delivery, in assessment, and in feedback. And yet these massive shifts have not disrupted the core logics of the learning discipline: that there is an examination; its results are individual and binding; and it is a potential life-changer. That allows the universities as organizations to adapt but not lose their fundamental source of authority and legitimacy. The technology may change their processes but not their rationale. Even so, a typical university needs to be flexible enough to cope with such shifts.

Organizational Actor hood/Autonomy

In earlier work to build a theory for the comparative analysis of business systems Whitley (1992) defined the core interest as the social origins of competitive systems for the control and coordination of economic action. He has now proposed the basis for a parallel theory applicable to institutions of higher education (Whitley 2012). The specific logics are different, as is the object of study. Here the key feature allowing

discrimination between the main types is the level of autonomy in the hands of the typical university. This is seen in four domains of authority: freedom over strategy and identity; over recruitment; over the teaching process; and over control of resources for teaching and research. Such autonomy is partly an outcome of societal institutions, but especially is it a result of the financial independence of a university. Such independence may also have permitted the long term evolution of structures within such a university that underpin the autonomy in ways that remain stable, as with the Oxbridge college formula. Such valuable freedom is severely reduced in circumstances where a central government defines syllabi, and/or where research grants are designed to foster outcomes in line with a societal or industry-led research plans rather than one established by free academics pursuing their own research agenda, but shaped by a concern for scholarly reputation in a specific field of knowledge.

Special Issues

Collegiality. Although teaching itself is usually a responsibility of the university's central control system, there are otherwise two broad options in organizing a student's experience of a university, (a) the organizing of university teaching and student life into multi-disciplinary colleges with their own dining and residence and social life, and competing identities, and (b) function-based units such as those for teaching a subject, or for the general housing of students. The former remains a formula with appeal to universities wishing to enhance the psychological attractiveness of the student and faculty experience. Europe is now observing a new version of this in a series of university colleges achieving very high success, based in Holland (Adriaansens 2006).

Cheating and corruption. Plagiarism has retreated dramatically in the face of new methods of electronic search to prevent it. But examination cheating – especially in public examinations for entrance qualifications such as GMAT remains problematic in some contexts.

Asian Perspectives and Responses

Appendix B contains a brief summary of the statements and positions taken by the respondents listed as having been interviewed. They are given as representative of commonly stated views in an exploratory study, but not in this paper reported by individual respondent for reasons of confidentiality. Further research after this pilot study could be designed to investigate more specifically the themes that emerged. We identify four issues that surfaced regularly in discussions with informants in Asia, and in the literature. We suggest that they have a bearing on theories of comparison for higher education systems.

The understanding of what knowledge is

This is treated by Li in a study of fundamentally different beliefs about learning, seen simply here as East and West, and echoing much revealed by Nisbett (2003) and by Nonaka and Zhu (2012) among others. Li proposes the following contrast:

The western learner approaches the challenge of understanding by two main processes. First, by adopting a creative attitude, to enquire through self-expression

that includes challenging authority and the existing canon of knowledge; second to interact with the external world with a view to mastery of it.

The Chinese learner focuses instead on cultivation of the self by adding sincerity and 'rectification of the heart and mind' to the basic investigation of things. The self-cultivation proceeds towards joining in the regulation of society, seen as the family, the state, and the wider world.

The implications for education are substantial, and especially for the kind of attempted blending that occurs as learning becomes global in various modes.

The possibility of benevolent domination

As a catalyst in the change of society from the pre-modern condition to the modern, perhaps the most crucial shift is the emergence of a more benevolent form of domination that can accompany empowerment and the open societies that go with free-market capitalism (Heilbroner 1985). In this process education is crucial, as without it the spontaneous innovation of new forms of societal order is impossible. This process is constrained by the general Asian tendency towards strong hierarchy. Tensions are increasing between the globally upwards trending aspiration by people for empowerment; and the traditional stability of many Asian societies that would be threatened by making such societies more 'open'. In this arena of debate education plays a vital role in the search for new societal formulae that are viable economically, culturally, and politically.

The teacher role

Related to the question of the meaning of learning is the meaning of teaching. Most Asian societies accord the teacher higher status than in other countries. The role is firmly established in the social fabric and so behaviour within it is difficult to change. So too is the possibly related addiction to rote learning. Asian education remains shaped by this. Experiments to amend this pattern have yet to show a clear trend of acceptance.

Student diligence

No commentary on education in Asia can ignore the high level of diligence and examination success among Asian students seen comparatively. This is founded in societal norms of conduct and social axioms affecting behaviour. Issues arise related to whether such success is general or specific to certain fields of knowledge, and if so why this might be so.

Analyzing the Role of Education in Societal Progress

It is not intended in this brief introductory summary to begin a process of analysis about the role of education as a change agent in the evolution of societal progress in Asian societies. That is addressed elsewhere in this working paper series. But it is appropriate to note the general research position taken within this series that a society needs to be seen as a complex adaptive system. Accepting this way of thinking is recommended because of the need to avoid mistakes in intervention by

policy makers, when the interactions of forces within the societal system can take the response in directions not foreseen.

Social systems can be seen as being of three levels of complexity: some are essentially just '*simple*' as in following a recipe; some are '*complicated*' as in assembling a car in a factory; others are seriously '*complex*', as in a system of education embedded in a societal and global context. For analysts the most crucial feature of phenomena that are at this high level of the complex is that:

"Successful social innovation combines all three problems - simple, complicated and complex - but the least understood is the complex. And yet complexity is the most fundamental level when we try to understand how social innovations occur. Single individuals, single actions and single organizations all play a part, but it is the subtle rules of engagement, between and among the elements, that is the force that seems to give initiatives a life of their own. In other words, complex systems comprise relationships." (Westley et al. 2007: p.10)

An example of the analytical problem is that of premature and partial evaluation of the progress of new initiatives. If done on a naïve basis, an evaluation using narrow and out-of-context definitions of accountability, can lead to early failure in development initiatives, and they can be shut down before they get chance to take off. What is needed is an acceptance of multiple determinacy, of possibly strong influence coming in from outside the system, of configurations of causes themselves interlinked, of reciprocity in causation, and of constant change of relations within the total. As Redding (2005) has suggested, a complex adaptive system and the use of 'thick description' in the tradition of Geertz, is a necessary corrective to much narrowness in thinking through anything as significant as societal change

Note

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Appendix A
Names of authors whose work is summarized in an annotated bibliography (HEAD Foundation Working Paper 47/2014) used as background to this paper. The field of study for the bibliography is <u>Education in the Global Context.</u>

Hans Adriaansens	Philip Altbach	Robert Anderson
Ben Ansell	John Brennan	Steven Brint
Roger Brown	Phil Brown	Bob Burgess
Craig Calhoun	William Clark	Rosemary Deem
Gili Drori	Jurgen Enders	Lars Engwall
David Finegold	David J Frank	Erhard Friedberg
Roger Geiger	Jane Gingrich	Jochen Glaser
Amada Goodall	Roger Goodman	Andy Green
Donald Heller	Bruce Johnstone	Rakesh Khurana
Roger King	Georg Krucken	Stefan Lange
Hugh Lauder	Robert (Bob) Locke	William Locke
Danielle Logue	Kerstin Martens	Simon Marginson
Ben Martin	Ken Mayhew	Robin Middlehurst
Cynthia Miller-Idriss	Christine Musselin	Rajani Naidoo
Sir Howard Newby	Martha Nussbaum	David Palfreyman
Justin Powell	Francisco Ramirez	Sir Peter Scott
Michael Shattock	Kerstin Sahlin	Ted Tapper
John Taylor	Mitchell Stevens	Linda Wedlin
Celia Whitchurch	Sir David Watson	Ben Wildavsky
Gareth Williams	Richard Whitley	Alison Wolf
	Paul Windolf	

Appendix B
People interviewed to obtain views from local sources on the role of education in Asian societal development. They were asked to discuss the three most significant challenges they were conscious of that affected their experience of education in their own context. First we give the list of those interviewed, and second a summary of the most commonly expressed viewpoints.

Note: This was a pilot study, and consequently was exploratory. Its aim was to identify trends and issues for future more structured analysis. It is not intended as a summary of scientifically established facts. Its validity as a guide to key issues lies in the experience of the respondents, and in that experience being grounded in the action of educating in Asia.

Those interviewed
Ms Louise Phua, Institute of Education/UCL, London (doctoral researcher on Asian education)
Prof Andrew Brown, Dean, Institute of Education/UCL (authority on education
  research)

Dr Gilbert Wong, Director, Poon Kam Kai Institute of Management, University of Hong Kong. (Experienced management educator).

Prof Michael Bond, Polytechnic University of Hong Kong. (Leading authority on Chinese psychology).

Mr Paul Chow, ex Director Hong Kong Stock Exchange. (Senior representative of business).

Mr Robert Chan, (Senior executive with long experience in Hong Kong, formerly CEO of TVB).

Prof Arthur Ellis, President, City University, Hong Kong. (Globally reputed authority on university research funding).

Ms Christina Siu, Director East Asia, Manchester Business School Worldwide, Hong Kong. (Experienced regional education organizer).

Ms Louise Ho, Manchester Business School Alumni Asssociation (China) Ltd. (Knowledge of education needs)

Ms Venus Cheung, External Relations Officer, Manchester Business School Worldwide, Hong Kong. (Knowledge of education needs).

Mr Simon Tam, Director, The Academy of Innovation, Hong Kong. (Experienced business educator with deep China experience).

Mr William Leung, Lawyer. (Extensive experience in corporate mediation, and work in schools administration).

Dr Anthony Ko, The Open University of Hong Kong. (Experienced educator and designer of distance learning programs).

Ms Helen Chung, Marketing Director, Hong Kong Science Park. (Innovation supporter).

Mr Allen Ma, Director, Hong Kong Science and Technology Park. (Innovation sponsor).

Ms Ada Cheung, Information Cluster, Hong Kong Science and Technology Park. (Innovation supporter).

Ms Julia Fung, Manager University and Industry Collaboration, Hong Kong Science and Technology Park (coordination sponsor).

Ms Dorothy Cheung, General Manager, Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce. (Representing business).

Ms Winnie Wong, Senior Manager Local Enterprise, Standard Chartered Bank, Hong Kong. (Representing small enterprise interests).

Ms Francine Hadjisotiriou, General Manager, European Chamber of Commerce, Hong Kong. (Representing business).

Ms Agnes Chan, Regional Managing Partner, Ernst and Young, Hong Kong. (Representing professionalism).

Mr Simon Galpin, Director-General, InvestHK (Hong Kong Government). (Representing government role in innovation).

Mr Steven Chan, President, Canadian Certified General Accountants Association of Hong Kong. (Representing professionalism).

Prof He Xiangang, School of International Business Administration, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics. (China education).

Prof Chen Zhijun, Director International Affairs, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics. (China education).

Prof Carl Fey, Dean, College of Business Administration, Nottingham University
  Ningbo Campus. (China international education).
Dr Edward Buckingham, Associate Professor, Nottingham University Ningbo
  Campus. (China international education).
Prof Li Zhihong, Dean, Renmin University of China Business School, Beijing.
  (Management education)
Prof Mao Ji-He, Associate Dean, Renmin University of China Business School,
  Beijing. (Management education).
Dr Mark Idelson, Assistant Professor, HSBC Business School, Peking University.
Dr Zhang Libin, Researcher on innovation, Guanghua School of Management,
  Peking University.
Dr Maris Farquharson, Lecturer in innovation, Nottingham University Business
  School, Ningbo, China.
Prof Zhang J Q, Sun Yat Sen University, Guangzhou, China.
Prof Li Xinchun, Director, Family Business Research Centre, Sun Yat Sen University
  Business School.
Dr Liang Neng, Associate Dean, China Europe International Business School,
  Shanghai.
Prof Jacky Y C So, Dean, Faculty of Business, Universidade de Macau.
Professor Natenapha Wailerdsak Yabushita, Institute of East Asian Studies,
  Thammasat University, Thailand. (Education in Thailand).
Ms Chanitda Wiwatchanon, Regional Librarian, International Labour Office (ILO)
  Thailand. (Specialist on regional data sources on human capital and
  education).
Ms Wassamon Lohachitranon, practising lawyer, Thailand. Graduate Chulalongkorn
  University. (Education in Thailand).

Groups of students were also interviewed at University of Hong Kong, Hong
Kong Polytechnic University, Republic University Singapore, Thammasat University
Bangkok, Hitotsubashi University Tokyo, Shangai Jiao Tong University and
Nottingham University Ningbo campus.

Views expressed in interviews: main ideas and issues
High dependence on teachers. Low individual autonomy of thought. Distance
learning handicapped by absence of teacher. Rote learning fosters teacher
dependence.
Programs allowing modules, flexible delivery, and portability to other cities, are
attractive in the executive education field.
Distribution chains are evolving as (e.g.) Japanese move abroad for education more
than previously.
Most governments are encouraging the expansion of education as a national policy.
Market knowledge of the education product is now rising as rankings and media
coverage make it possible for buyers to understand options globally.
The shift towards credentialism that started around 1980 is now being
counterbalanced by concerns for more general thinking, using broader frameworks,
more disciplines, and more critical thinking.

It is possible for people to 'fake' autonomy of thinking, and to look as if they think critically, so the transition to new forms of learning is slow.

In several countries politics enters the field of university education and cannot be easily kept out (e.g. in Hong Kong)

Partnering with institutions in China is more difficult than it first seems, and more costly than usually anticipated.

The financialization of education, under the accountability pressures of 'new public management' is preventing the evolution of more appropriate new teaching methods, and supporting the retention of rote learning.

The key to success in higher education is the creation of new knowledge, not the re-cycling of old. The new is what a university is for.

The model of the US National Science Foundation is sponsoring workshops to integrate work across subjects is why multi-disciplinary work comes to be so strong there.

High faculty mobility is also a force for good as far as knowledge generation is concerned.

The internationalization of universities is very visible in the region and has very positive results for industry.

The internet and e-commerce are driving high penetration of new forms into the field of education.

The Hong Kong adoption of the four year degree model has been very beneficial in broadening the student experience, and in increasing the useage and productivity of university facilities.

The anticipated mobility of labour is less developed than it might be because of the strong counter-pull of industrial districts in many countries.

In many rural areas students still remain disadvantaged as far as access to university is concerned.

Pragmatism is high and can lead students to take double degrees, and so dilute their quality of learning.

The impact of rankings has been to put faculty under mounting pressure to produce research output.

There is often a mismatch between education provision and real-world need, as e.g. in banking courses being taught paperwork systems (because that is easy to teach) instead of the marketing and sales skills needed (that are difficult to teach).

There is a negative attitude in many Asian societies towards vocational qualifications, as opposed to university degrees, and this may originate in the heightened respect for formal education, especially in traditional ideologies such as Confucianism.

Under the evident concerns of many regional governments to control corruption, many students expect to be taught courses on ethics, and to understand the role of morality in society.

A model of 'service to society' is evolving in several countries for inclusion in national syllabuses.

In a move towards greater financial autonomy, many universities are increasing their cultivation of ties with alumni.

Some countries with strongly embedded use of their indigenous language (as e.g. Thailand, China, Indonesia etc) find themselves handicapped in developing high levels of technical education.

For faculty in many countries there has been a long decline in status, from an earlier period when they were seen as an elite bureaucracy supported by government, to a situation now where they receive low pay by societal standards. The drift of high quality talent away from the profession is of concern in certain ASEAN countries.

The impact of a global trend towards the expectation of empowerment is bringing more democratic and participative tendencies to the teaching process in many universities.