

# The Shifting Ecology of Research in Asian Pacific Higher Education

Imitation or Innovation

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# The Context

- Research/scholarship/knowledge production the most important mission of HE
- This model imitated widely: goal—excellence and innovation, high rankings
- In A&P massification/differentiation of HE, quest for world class, = more funding, status, prestige; thus mission creep/“Carnegie creep”

# Characteristics of High Quality Research HEIs

- High quality faculty
- High quality undergraduates and grads
- Supportive intellectual climate
- High quality research facilities, infrastructure
- Sufficient long term funding to remain competitive
- Supportive leadership with a vision
- Academic Freedom

# Some Subtle Shifts

- From “Happy Anarchy” to commercialization, marketization, triple helix etc. Shift from public mission to private mission
- New research culture of dependence is replacing “cherished culture of independence”
- “Big Science” dominates the R&D hierarchy (Dorr data)
- Ideas such as “knowledge society” and “knowledge economy” linked to the market begin to drive R&D
- Competitive Rankings at forefront
- Most HEIs are in an “imitative” rather than “innovative” mode

# Some Asian Responses

- China: 211, 985, CAS, facilitating university-industry linkages, etc.
  - Success in imitation to some degree
  - Evaluations show lack of innovation, question investment and output
  - Quantitative output has not been matched by qualitative output
  - Research gap between 211, 985, CAS and all other HEIs increased
  - Gap between Chinese HEIs and top ranked WCU has not narrowed appreciably
  - “How much money is enough to reach world class goal”; and is this of value? (Chen 2006).

# Some Asian Responses

- Japan: Toyoma Plan, Top 30 Centers of Excellence, Global Centers of Excellence, WPI
  - Mostly in the sciences though some in liberal arts
  - Various evaluations conducted by MEXT, Mitsubishi Research Institute and others conclude impact has been mixed, clearly an imitative model, politically influenced, research gap between haves and have nots increased; lack of innovation; can it be afforded for future?
  - Forced model of research/scholarship in order to receive funding; desire to be called a RU; new faculty in second tier HEIs required to conduct “research”

# Some Asian Responses

- Republic of Korea: BK21
  - Did not only concentrate on elite research universities but more diversified
  - Focused on quality of graduate students as well as faculty
  - Research productivity clearly increased (publication metrics)
  - No narrowing of research gap b/t Korea and leading world HEIs (Shin, Seong, RAND)
  - Clearly imitative “most elite Korean HEIs aspire to become like Harvard and Todai” (Kim 2007; Shin 2009)
  - Widening gap b/t elites and all other HEIs

# Some Asian Responses

- Hong Kong/Singapore:
  - HKU, HKUST, NUS recognize it is unrealistic to “good at everything” and have deployed strategies to excel in selected areas
  - Utilize a diversified and global faculty recruitment strategy—faculty “who think in different ways”
  - HKUST achieved high marks from the QS rankings for innovative approach to research agendas
  - More innovative than others, still imitative on faculty evaluation methods



# Some Asian Responses

- Taiwan: HEMPC plan of “concentrated investment”—2003. WCU, COE, Teaching Excellence. COE \$330 mil. For 10 years. 1 HEI in the top 100; 10 R Centers in Asian top 50. Promote Research and Innovation. (Angela 2012)
  - Publications up significantly
  - SCI, SSCI increased
  - Most HEIs use this as benchmark
  - Public concern that teaching would suffer
  - Increased inequality in resource distribution
  - Large proportion of HEIs marginalized
  - Financial sustainability questioned
  - How much of this was imitative and how much innovative?

# Some Asian Responses

- India: Colonial Legacy—“retailing knowledge”
  - Lags far behind other Asian nations in local research prowess
  - Distinction between teaching and research
  - No incentives for faculty to conduct research
  - Does not imitate but does not innovate either
  - Has the opportunity to not be trapped in old paradigm; Tata (2013); Indiresan (2007) concludes India’s HEIs could be very innovative with research if they had the “will” to do so; “no entrenched vested interests

# Imitation Has Costs

- Imitation is tempting (WCU, EGM; etc.) but may limit opportunities to be innovative
- Ladder climbing, copying, Undue Western influence (Mok)
- Reward structure of dominant model draws attention away from teaching; students are short-changed; faculty divide develops
- Increase in faculty numbers, small number of “elite journals and publishers”, more faculty fail; fewer on tenure track, more part-timers

# Knowledge Production

- Imitation of the pressure to publish “works of significance”, “one of a kind” research leaves mass of HEIs and their faculties with impossible knowledge production task
- Increase in belief that it is quantity rather than quality that matters, resulting in an increase in research “of dubious worth” (Bok) Quality can not be fully captured by metrics (NAS)
- Does not auger well for bright new scholars who are not part of elite HEIs; they are more numerous, publication outlets remain narrow and confined, research is more expensive

# More Innovative Knowledge Production Approach

- Boyer: add new categories to definition of scholarship: integration, application and teaching
- Likewise with definition of peer review, creativity, pace of publication, value popular writing, textbook publication etc.
- Differentiate HE systems ala California Master Plan (although here we see “mission creep”)
- New Carnegie classification: community engagement; modular classification approach
- Diverse paths to tenure and promotion
- How would these suggestions be received in Asia?

# Logic of this Dilemma

- Harvard model defines what constitutes “real research”
- In US this model came to be widely imitated; is the same true in Asia?
- Innovations such as Cal MP sought to resolve this but “mission creep” emerged
- Massification of HE in Asia results in plethora of HEIs ill-equipped to compete on this one-size-fits all model
- Need for alternative ways of approaching research mission of HE

# Some Modest Proposals for Reform

- Innovative use of regional and international networks to promote more joint research, implications for mobility and migration of talent
- More recognition and value of interdisciplinary research; breaking down disciplinary monopoly of what constitutes research/scholarship
- Revise “publish or perish” for advancement
- Aligning research locally with world of work
- Increasing student involvement, both UGs and Grads with research projects-improves student learning and research
- Experimentation with differentiated “systems” and missions
- Recognize multiple forms of scholarly contribution

- Develop diverse tenure paths and faculty contracts
- Alternative approaches to the way faculty are produced
- Develop customized contracts with equitable rewards related to discovery, integration, application and teaching
- Reform tenure process; problem not with outcome but process--uncertainty, publication focused, rank issues.
- Have clearly stated objectives, new incentives, reviews
- Reduce reliance on SCI, SSCI etc.
- Encourage faculty to engage in outside activities (consulting contact with outside world; helps connect students with real world challenges, such work should be counted as “real research” and measured appropriately
  
- Reward innovation as much as imitation