



Asia Pacific Higher Education Research Partnership



Innovation, Policy, Governance and Quality

CONCEPT PAPER

Senior Seminar

“The Changing Nature and Value of the Flagship University”

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CONCEPT PAPER

Envisioning the Asian Flagship University: Past and Future

Zhejiang University Seminar Presenters Guide and Concept Paper

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1. Presenters Guide

The following provides a brief essay on the *New Flagship University* model as an alternative narrative to global rankings and the notion of World Class Universities (WCU), as a preparatory Concept Paper for our APHERP seminar that will be held on May 23-25 2016 at Zhejiang University. Here we offer thoughts on the model's attributes and challenges regarding its relevance in Asia, and a set of queries for the presenters/chapter authors to consider in their contributions.

We ask that each contributor focus their presentation and working paper on one of the two thematic approaches:

Option A - Address one or more of the following three broad questions related to the national or regional case examples which you are most familiar and comfortable with:

- What has been the history of leading national universities in your nation or region that you are writing about (nation-states or regions), what we call *Traditional Flagship Universities*, including their sense of mission, programs, characteristics, and influence on the societies they are intended to serve?
- How is the notion of WCU's, and global rankings and similar benchmarking, influencing national higher education systems, and more specifically these Traditional Flagship Universities and, perhaps, any newer universities?
- How is the *New Flagship University* model applicable or useful for these leading national universities? Ancillary questions: Is the history, cultural and socioeconomic needs of these leading national universities significantly different that they are forging their own distinct, or perhaps, Asian model? What are the important contextual variables that constrain and influence institutions that might claim the *New Flagship* title?

Option B - Provide a comparative description analysis and discussion of reforms within a selected group of Asian nations that focuses on one of the following "Policy Realms" and practices profiled in the *New Flagship* model:

- Governance and Management Capacity

- Seeking Improvements in Undergraduate Education
 - Challenges and Reforms in Graduate and Professional Education
 - Economic Engagement – including such issues regional labor needs, and/or technology transfer and start-ups
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2. Envisioning the Asian Flagship University - Concept Paper

Rankings and World Class Visions

Perhaps to a degree unmatched in other parts of the globe, the notion of a “World Class University” and the focus on its close relative, global rankings of universities, dominates the higher education policymaking of ministries and major universities in Asia. The emergence of global rankings, and its co-dependent WCU ideal, has captured the attention of higher educational officials, while at the same time, is being critically appraised by many academics and stakeholders in the field of higher education.

Just focusing on China for the moment, in the late 1990s, and in the midst of a dramatic investment in and re-organization of China’s higher education system, ministerial officials asked researchers at Shanghai Jiaotong University to help devise a way to understand the quality of its national universities. There existed national rankings of institutions in the U.S., with most focused on providing consumer guides. But there was no global ranking of universities. Focused on the concept of research productivity as the primary indicator of quality and the marker of the best universities in the world, the first Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) was generated for the Chinese government and became a regular exercise and publication in 2003.

Why the attention almost exclusively on research productivity and a few key markers of prestige, like Nobel Laureates? One major reason was, and is, that globally retrievable citation indexes (also a relatively new phenomenon) and variables such as research income are now readily available and not subject to the labor intensive, and sometimes dubious, efforts to request and get data from individual institutions. But another reason is the sense that research productivity and influence remain the key identifiers of the best universities. The ancillary is that other primary missions of the most influential universities, such as undergraduate and graduate education, public service, the role of universities in socio-economic mobility, regional economic development, are less important and, ultimately, harder to measure.

Around the same time as the publication of the first ARWU, the mantra of what is and what is not a “World Class University” (WCU) also emerged in full force, in part influenced by the growing anxiety among many nations that they did not have one or more top-tier research

universities thought crucial to their economic competitiveness, and by NGO's like the World Bank who now argued that such universities needed replicating in most developing economies.

Because the character, behaviors and attributes of a WCU remain vague even to its promoters, the default was to simply refer to the ARWU, or one of a handful of other global rankings of universities that have since emerged. Most nations in Asia are pursuing higher education polices, and funding schemes, towards uplifting a selected group of national universities into the global ranking heavens. National goals of reaching the top 100, or more ambitiously the top 25, are ubiquitous.

Hence, the national role of universities as engines of socioeconomic mobility, knowledge production in STEM fields, for collaborating with local businesses and government agencies, of creating the next generation of leaders and the like are not relevant in a globally based bell-curve notion of what constitutes the ideal university.

The *New Flagship University* model briefly outlined in the following introductory section of our planned book, and articulated in more detail in the recent book of the same name, attempts to provide a more holistic and ecological vision of what constitute the best and most influential national universities. This includes a broad conception of the purpose and goals of these institutions that include the type of variables, like socioeconomic mobility and regional economic development, largely ignored or missing from the pronouncements, policy and funding initiatives related to the WCU desires of ministries and many universities. The model, as described, provides four "Policy Realms" to help shape our understanding of the operational side of being a *New Flagship University*: their role in national systems of higher education, their core missions of teaching and learning and research, public service and economic engagement, and their internal management and accountability practices. And it offers examples of key policies, activities, and outputs. To be sure, many leading research-intensive universities are already pursuing many of the aspects of the *Flagship* model within their own cultural and political realities, as presented in the many institutional examples offered in the original book.

In the face of the dominant WCU and ranking paradigm, most academic leaders and their academic communities have had difficulty conceptualizing, and articulating, their grander purpose and multiple engagements with society. The *Flagship* moniker harkens back to this larger vision found not only in the origins of the U.S. land grant universities, but also national universities in Latin America. The *New Flagship* qualification helps to stress that the most productive and engaged universities—those that seek societal relevancy—are much more diverse and complex in the range of their activities and goals than in any other time in their history. Take almost any current public research university, and some non-profit privates, and compare their sense of purpose, funding, programs, and expectations of stakeholders, with fifty or even twenty years ago, and they are very different.

At the same time, the *Flagship* model is not a rejection of global rankings. Ranking products are here to stay. They are a useful benchmark for ministries and universities, and citizens. The problem is that they represent a very narrow band of what it means to be a leading university within a region, within a nation. Further, while there are effective strategies to boost article production and citations, and rankings, the WCU advocates do not provide much guidance, or knowledge, on what organizational behaviors and methods can lead to greater productivity in research, teaching, and public service to best meet the needs of the societies they serve.

The *New Flagship* model is not intended as a set of required attributes and practices. This begs the question of what policies and practices, and even the larger understanding of the purpose of a university, are culturally determined and relevant to a particular nation-state. As Douglass notes in his book, “To state the obvious, different nations and their universities operate in different environments, reflecting their own national cultures, politics, expectations, and the realities of their socioeconomic world. The purpose [of the *New Flagship* model] is not to create a single template or checklist, but an expansive array of characteristics and practices that connects a selective group of universities—an aspiration model. However, many institutions and ministries may see only a subset as relevant, or only some aspirations as achievable in the near term” (Douglass pp. 39-40).

And finally, an important tenant of the *New Flagship* model is that there are limits to the effectiveness of government and ministerial interventions into the operation of their universities. Most universities within Asia, and within Europe and elsewhere, have had weak internal cultures of accountability and management. Government driven interventions and funding incentives have pushed much needed reform in much of the world. But ultimately, leading universities need to have greater control and build their own internal academic culture and efforts focused on institutional self-improvement. The *New Flagship* model attempts to decipher, and provide examples, of pathways for building this culture and for internal accountability practices that bolster academic management.

Asia’s Leading National Universities: The Context

Higher education in Asia has a long history of elite, leading national universities that have served the region well over the decades of their existence. Most are highly selective institutions, employing among the best scholars, and serving as the primary path for creating a nation’s civic elites in the absence of other postsecondary institutions (Hawkins 2013). These leading universities have, historically, been grounded in national service, but with a more limited vision of their role in socioeconomic mobility, economic development, and public service. There was little external pressure and internal desire to change. One thinks of Tokyo University, Zhejiang University, Peking University and Seoul National University in East Asia, and on a smaller scale their counterparts in Southeast Asia and South Asia, all largely fitting the mold of what we are

calling the *Traditional Flagship Universities*. Even as national governments pushed to expand access to higher education—the process of massification—these leading national universities sometimes seem stuck in time.

But in more recent decades, leading Asian national universities have undergone a metamorphosis, pushed by increasing expectations of a much more expanded role in society and the competitive needs of national economies. Because their mission was primarily “internal”, these universities were not initially concerned with competing with other universities outside of the national setting. With the rise of the complex interplay of neoliberalism, globalization and internationalization beginning in earnest in the 1990s, however, ministries and universities began to look “externally” for benchmarks of their quality and performance framed almost exclusively around the WCU/ranking paradigm—a worldwide phenomenon.

While the pursuit of improved rankings and a claim to WCU status continues as seemingly the primary goal for many universities in the Asian Pacific region, there has been a growing debate about the value and feasibility of this vision. Alternative ways are being discussed which challenge and critique this model and suggest other more creative ways to look at the role of teaching, community service, R&D and scholarship in higher education. In turn, this has created a “predicament” for these Asian *Flagship Universities*: in a rapidly changing ecology of higher education in the region, Asian universities are compelled to search for strategic ways to increase research income and journal publications, and citations, while also seeking a more holistic approach to their mission and engagement with the regions they serve.

Is it possible to strike a balance between teaching and research in the modern university or is the “research model” being blindly imitated globally? In the *New Flagship* model, these are compatible, indeed mutually reinforcing ideals; but this is not true for those focused myopically on the WCU and ranking paradigm.

It has been difficult for universities in the region to avoid the temptation to be imitative rather than innovative in the pursued of a WCU status. The strategy of imitation has been largely focused on research productivity and the practices found in the U.S. and the UK, while ignoring the ethos of creating and sustaining an academic community. It is an erroneous understanding of an “emerging global model” (EGM) (Hawkins and Mok 2015).

In the rush toward imitation, its important to keep in mind a criticism of the American research-intensive universities where many faculty are increasingly attracted to the prestige of research and away from teaching as a core responsibility, where increasing numbers of students are left without benefit of mentoring by the very faculty they came to encounter. As faculty sort themselves out along the research axis (those who are successful and those who are not),

particularly in STEM fields, another divide appears as those faculty less able as researchers pick up the teaching load or are simply let go through the tenure process. Again, this is a “research is the primary product” model that may not be the most productive for many universities and may in fact limit the possibilities of becoming an “innovative” university. Is this the current path being pursued by top Asian universities?

A Yi Liu Future?

This brings us back to the concept of the *New Flagship University* in the Asia region. There a place for both the *New Flagship* ideals and practices and the desire for the ranking focused WCU model to co-exist. As Douglass argues, the *Flagship* model can be a route to WCU status, but WCU status is less likely to guarantee status as a *New Flagship University*. In a message intended for both ministries and university leaders in Asia and elsewhere, Douglass notes that the current top ranked research-intensive universities on the ARWU, and particularly the public universities in the US, were not built around a narrow band of quantitative measures of research productivity or reputational surveys. “The path to national and international relevance rooted in their larger socio-economic purpose, and to internal organizational cultures and practices focused on self-improvement.”

In contrasting the WCU paradigm with the *New Flagship* model it is important to note that scholars of higher education, and practitioners and ministerial actors, may have their own concepts of what a *Flagship* is, or should be in different parts of the vast area we call Asia.

The *Flagship* model also has a number of major assumptions, including that national and regional higher education systems have significant levels of mission differentiation among institutions and a place for only a select number of truly leading or *yi liu* universities; that there is a significant level of policy and practice convergence, and best practices that can be adopted to different national cultures and traditions; and that universities can manage their evolution if given enough autonomy and sufficient levels of academic freedom.

The political, economic, and cultural peculiarities may make such assumptions a non-reality in many nations. Such was the conclusion for a number of the author’s who contributed to the initial book on the *New Flagship University*, with contributors from Latin America, Russia, and Asia noting that the biggest obstacles lay in the civil service mentality of faculty, severely inadequate university governance and management structures, and governmental controls and, often, political dynamics that made universities inordinately subject to political movements and encroachments. But all the authors also understood the *New Flagship* concept as aspirational—essentially a guide and reference point that was desirable and needed to help shape the discourse in their respective regions.

National higher education systems in Asia are rapidly changing. Many academic leaders and some ministries are beginning to understand that the bell-curve approach of rankings and the research dominant notion of WCU are no longer adequate to help guide policy, funding, and practice.

In addition to the three major questions related to the case example option and the thematic option (governance and management capacity, undergraduate/first degree education, graduate/professional education, or economic engagement), we are asking our contributing chapter authors to contemplate, we add these additional questions for your consideration:

- How are ministries approaching the issue of mission differentiation in their national systems (e.g., accreditation processes in Taiwan and Japan for example), and how are they identifying and positioning a subset of universities as leading national universities?
- What are the main policy and funding programs from national/regional governments that focused on the WCU and ranking paradigm and what its their influence within universities and what are their outcomes?
- Does the contemporary flagship university model offer some pathways forward to this resolution and if not, why not?"
- What features of the flagship university already exist in Asia's top HEIs, and which do not?
- Which forces and factors work toward the new flagship model and which create obstacles?
- Do the contemporary leading national universities offer something for the *New Flagship* model (as described by Douglass) that might be adapted in a positive manner?

There are obviously other important questions and issues regarding the discussion we are having here but it is hoped that your papers will seek to engage and discuss some of those that are presented here.

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