

Higher Education in the Asia-Pacific

HIGHER EDUCATION DYNAMICS

VOLUME 36

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Simon Marginson • Sarjit Kaur
Erlenawati Sawir
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Higher Education in the Asia-Pacific

Strategic Responses to Globalization

 Springer

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Preface

*'We can be heroes
Just for one day ...'*
~Heroes, David Bowie, 1977¹

These are the great times of higher education in Asia-Pacific and especially of its signature institution, which is the research university. Higher education seems to expand without limit, along with the middle classes that are always its mainstay. Its remarkable growth, scarcely touched by the global financial crisis that has battered universities in North America and UK/Europe, is financed by both governments and families. The mix varies by country but the role of families is more important in the Asia-Pacific, especially in East Asia, than in most other parts of the world. First-generation families are moving into higher education everywhere in the region, certain that the sacrifices they are making for their children will pay off. Higher education is taking into itself an ever-growing accumulation of hopes and dreams, of each and every national people. Government and public expect much of higher education. And governments and public wait with impatience for the pay-off from their investment, the better future that is expected to follow: stellar individual opportunities at home and abroad, accelerated national growth and a modernized economy, global research power. A larger figure for the nation, as it stands out decisively, beyond the long shadow of the West at last, and begins to make its own place in the world. All this and more higher education institutions will provide.

It is too much to expect. As the Asian-Pacific nations follow Japan and Singapore into the era of high industrial modernization, they will find that after all, universities cannot do everything. Perhaps, like Japan, they will start to underfund them. Perhaps, like Singapore, they will invest even more so as to move ahead of the pack. But in this process higher education is becoming central, everywhere. It is also becoming more global. The more research universities evolve, the more some of their activities happen behind the back of governments, or move beyond the border and outside their reach. This is frustrating for governments, which want their

¹ From the album *Heroes*, RCA, recorded 14 October 1977, Hansa Studio by the Wall, West Berlin.

universities to cut a larger figure in the world, but also want control. We expect that the potential for national/global tensions, always there in research universities, will increase as globalization becomes still more influential.

The nations of the Asia-Pacific—which in this book means littoral East Asia, Southeast Asia and the nearby Western Pacific countries—are at very different points on long and diverse curves of development of modern higher education and research systems. They range from the higher education system with the second largest level of investment in the world (Japan); and the largest in student numbers and the second largest in aggregate R&D (China); to Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Papua New Guinea, where participation and spending are near the global bottom and research activity scarcely exists; and Indonesia, where a great population is scarcely served by tertiary provision that is still rudimentary in large parts of the country. Only in Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan China and Singapore has national infrastructure in higher education become decisively positioned at the centre of national life in the manner of Western Europe and North America. However, others such as Malaysia and Thailand could join that list fairly soon; and many expect that sooner or later neighbouring India, just off the edge of the Asia-Pacific, will kick-start the transformation of higher education in South Asia. The example power of the five stellar cases—above all, the power of China's extraordinary self-transformation through investment in education and research—looks irresistible. Though the rest of Asia-Pacific is at different points on the various trajectories, all nations seem to be moving in the same direction.

This book was conceived while Sarjit Kaur was working for a period of 5 months in 2007 at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne, alongside Simon Marginson and Erlenawati Sawir. We were delighted at the enthusiasm of the first contributors we approached. The book kept on growing from there. Though eventually 12 nations were included in its coverage, along with the broader regional chapters and two on neighbouring countries, we sincerely regret that individual chapters on some Asia-Pacific cases such as Korea, Taiwan China, Philippines, Laos, New Zealand and Fiji were not included. These countries are included in some of the comparisons in Part I, and we hope that the omissions can be rectified in a future volume. Another dimension we would hope to cover more completely in future is the role of regional and global agencies in education in the Asia-Pacific and the potential for regional organization, which is slowly growing.

It is exciting to be working in research and scholarship on higher education, in the Asia-Pacific, at this time. This book has been a pleasure to prepare. We hope that it stimulates discussion about the many themes and issues raised by the contributing authors. We would like to record our heartfelt thanks to Yoka Janssen at Springer, whose guidance and support were crucial to the successful completion of the book. Thanks also to Annemarie Keur at Springer, and to Peter Maassen and Joe Muller, Editors of the Springer book series *Higher Education Dynamics* in which this volume has been included.

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Simon Marginson
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