Higher Education Regionalization in Asia Pacific: Implications for Governance, Citizenship and University Transformation

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Abstract
Higher education regionalization in Asia Pacific: Implications for governance, citizenship and university transformation edited by J. N. Hawkins, K. H. Mok, and D. E. Neubauer describes and summarizes the conversations happening around regionalization in the Asia-Pacific region, and is a potential resource for the higher education community interested in the Asia-Pacific region.

Keywords
Higher education, regionalization, Asia Pacific

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*Higher education regionalization in Asia Pacific: Implications for governance, citizenship and university transformation* edited by J. N. Hawkins, K. H. Mok, and D. E. Neubauer is timely because it describes and summarizes the conversations happening around regionalization in the Asia-Pacific region. According to Knight, higher education regionalization is about the “…process of building closer collaboration and alignment among higher education actors and systems within a defined area of framework called a region” (p. 19). Over the years, regional collaboration between these higher education actors and systems has grown exponentially through “…regional based university, regional student mobility programs and pan-regional higher education associations” (Knight, 2013, p. 106). In fact, the importance of a globalized society and the notion of internationalization of higher education have pushed the boundaries of regionalization on a transnational level, known as transnationalism (Altbach, 2014; Knight, 2013). Altbach points out that international students are not the only ones to cross borders. Higher education institutions in the United States are also following students' footsteps by collaborating with foreign institutions or by opening campuses in other countries (Altbach, 2014).

This book consists of three parts—conceptual issues (Chapter 1 to 4), country studies (Chapter 5 to 8), and regulatory and governance dimensions (Chapter 9 to 12). In Chapter 1, Deane E. Neubauer introduces the volume with numerous thought-provoking questions
addressed later in the chapters by the various authors of this book such as “what are various ways to describe regionalization such that they capture the full range of activities being undertaken within the higher education community? In what ways throughout the region is this impression toward the regionalization of higher education producing or stimulating new and demonstrable examples of governance? Might a Bologna-type accord be a possibility for some quantum of new regional governance activity for a few countries, but not for others? Will there be a distinctive regionalism ‘with Asian characteristics’? How have individual nations/HEIs coped with this evolving regionalization?” (pp. 11-13).

In Chapter 2, Jane Knight provides an overview of regionalization of higher education. According to Knight, higher education regionalization is based on the following: “…it is an ongoing and evolutionary process; …the notion of intentional region building based on existing and new relationships and activities by a diversity of actors; …the view that region is defined by the players involved and can be interpreted as a specific area or an organizational/programmatic/ political framework” (p. 19). This introductory chapter is particularly important for readers because Knight not only introduces what other parts of the world are doing for regionalization of higher education but also discusses and suggests multiple ways (i.e. functional, organizational, and political) to understand regionalization. For instance, she begins with various definitions and terminologies based on the concept of a “region,” such as regionalism, regionalness, regionality, regionalization, regional integration, and interregional cooperation (p. 18). These definitions are essential to understand regionalization as Knight states that although the meaning of “region” is central to the various terminologies, the definition changes based on the suffixes. Such as, “the suffix ‘ism’ relates more to an ideology or set of beliefs, ‘ization’ focuses on the process of becoming, and ‘tion’ reflects a condition” (p. 18).

In Chapter 3, Molly N. N. Lee analyzes the joint ventures between universities and the various initiatives taken by Asian intergovernmental, nongovernmental, and regional organizations that have been successful such as Universitas 21, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the South East Asian Minister of Education Organization (SEAMEO), Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning (ASAIHL), and Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) etc. Lee writes that “population growth, democratization of secondary education, and the growing affluence of many countries in the region” are contributing to the need to expand higher education systems in the Asia-Pacific region (p. 37). This expansion leads to coalition among institutions through various exchanges. This particular chapter would be helpful for officials looking into establishing “regional initiatives” in other parts of the world such as south Asia.

In chapter 4, Miki Sugimura reviews “the function of regional networks in East Asian higher education” and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) (p. 45). Sugimura argues “regional networks and international cooperation in East Asia symbolize an implication of international higher education” (p. 46). These regional networks such as ASEAN, SEAMEO, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), UNESCO, and Asian Development Bank (ADB) administer the various transnational programs whether it is government cooperated, regionally organized, or institutionally based programs. Along with East Asia,
South Asia has also made some progress with its regional network known as SAARC. Through this network, South Asian countries are working together in spite of their political, economic and cultural differences.

Part 2 of this volume consists of country studies from Japan, China, Indonesia, and the Philippines. In Chapter 5, Akiyoshi Yonezawa and Arthur Meerman write that although Japan is one of the wealthiest countries in Asia, its position in the world education system lags behind. Japan has implemented several major programs to boost its internationalization efforts; however, for political and economic reasons these plans did not succeed. Additionally, Japan is competing with other countries in the region that are economically strong and have also improved in the area of internationalization. For instance, China and South Korea are doing quite well politically, economically and educationally among other nations in the Asia-Pacific. Nevertheless, the recent Collective Action for Mobility Program of University Students (CAMPUS) Asia initiative may put Japan back on the map as it tries to initiate collaborations with China and Korea, two of Asia’s most financially powerful countries.

In Chapter 6, Wen Wen looks at what role China plays in terms of “international student mobility” within the Asia-Pacific region. According to Wen Wen, “among the different forms of regionalization that may emerge, economic integration is the key, as it is definitely accelerating” (p. 79). With this growth in economic integration, the demand for regional cooperation becomes a necessity. Since the foundation of China in 1949, the country has become a popular destination for international students. In 2008, China reported the greatest increase of international student enrollment since international education was implemented. Wen Wen finds that “internationalizing Chinese students” has become the focal point instead of placing the importance on “…improving the Chinese higher education market for international students” (p.87).

In Chapter 7, Anthony R. Welch discusses the Indonesian higher education in relation to regionalism. Unlike China and Japan, Indonesia suffers from several issues such as governance, demographics and finance that often hinder regionalization efforts. The Ministry of Higher Education (MNE) and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) are in charge of Indonesian higher education. Additionally, according to Welch, “Islamic higher education,” “relations with China” and “domestic constraints” limit regionalism in Indonesia (pp. 98-104). While discussing Islamic higher education as a limiting factor of regionalism in Indonesia, Welch also confers Islamic higher education within Malaysia. He notes that Malaysia is not shy about informing international students about their “Islamic environment,” in fact, in 2010, 10,024 of 87,000 Malaysian international students came from Islamic countries (p.101). However, in the face of these limits, Indonesia has taken several initiatives toward regionalization and is part of various regional organizations such as ASEAN, APEC, and SEAMEO.

In Chapter 8, Regina M. Ordonez raises a valuable question: “…how can HEIs produce more Filipinos who will qualify one day to be part of the corporate, institution-based labor market, rather than the domestic worker market?” (p. 119). Due to lack of jobs and lower wages in the Philippines, Filipinos have been working outside of their home country. These overseas Filipino workers are known as the “unsung heroes of the Philippines” because of their financial...
contribution in the Filipino economy (p. 122). Additionally, Ordonez finds that “...96 percent of private HEIs are not up to par in producing high-quality graduates who can compete in the labor market of corporate jobs” (p. 129). This is also true for public institutions; however, the new administration has acknowledged this issue and is in the process of improving education quality.

In Chapter 9, Ka H. Mok studies what Singaporean and Malaysian governments are doing for transnational higher education (TNHE). Malaysia has been involved in multiple projects because it wants to be known as the “regional education hub” (p. 141). It has several branch campuses established by foreign universities from Australia and the UK. It has also 110 twinning programs with numerous universities from the UK. Similar to Malaysia, Singapore has been at the forefront of developing programs and initiatives to improve its higher education system such as Global Schoolhouse initiative, Singapore Education, and joint-degree program.

In Chapter 10, Molly N. N. Lee examines how Asian countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, China, Japan, South Korea, and India have restructured their higher education systems in terms of autonomy and accountability. According to Lee, practices such as deregulation, corporatization and privatization contribute to institutional autonomy (p. 164). For instance, based on the Universities and University Colleges Act of 1971, Malaysian public universities are required to be “corporatized” (p. 165). By turning to corporatization, public universities are no longer controlled by government rules. Institutions in Thailand went through several policy changes in the last three decades, and institutional autonomy was part of these changes. Higher education institutions in Vietnam now are in complete control over their student enrollments and graduation requirements, academic curricula, budget allocation, and faculty recruitment (p. 169). However, to what extent institutions can express their autonomy varies among institutions, and only two institutions in Vietnam are endorsed with the utmost autonomy.

In Chapter 11, John N. Hawkins investigates “the challenges of regionalism and harmonization for higher education in Asia” (p. 177). Hawkins suggests that in order to implement successful regional organizations (RO), one must take into account the “historical context” of a country (p. 179). For instance, without minimizing the issues between Japan, Korea and China about the “…historical disputes and military balance of power,” it will be difficult for these three economically powerful countries to reach a consensus about RO (p. 179). In Chapter 12, John N. Hawkins, Ka H. Mok and Deane E. Neubauer summarize the book. According to the authors, “regionalization is not a linear process, demographic differentiation within the Asia-Pacific region is a critical parameter for higher education regionalization, and migration in and of itself is a sufficiently significant variable to plot as a regionalization force” (pp. 192-195).

In summary, John N. Hawkins, Ka H. Mok, and Deane E. Neubauer's edited manuscript is a significant contribution to the field of regionalization. It is an excellent resource for the higher education community interested in the Asia-Pacific region. However, this book is written for specialized audience in mind—readers with knowledge, expertise, and interests in regionalism and in Asia-Pacific. On this basis, this book may be difficult to follow for novice researchers and the general higher education community. Also, having a section of definition of
terms, as well as the list of acronyms would have been helpful for readers. Moreover, the chapters on country studies may not be pertinent for some audience due to its narrow scope on the Asia-Pacific region. Despite the narrow focus, this book would be beneficial for political and institutional policy makers interested in collaborating with other institutions. Having more emphasis on quality assurance with regionalization initiatives would have strengthened the book. Though the information may be intricate at times for readers unfamiliar with international education and the concept of regionalization, it is ultimately educational, and the authors provide the readers with an impressive overview of the regionalization of higher education across the Asia-Pacific region.

References

About the Author
Neete Saha is currently a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Administration program at Kent State University. She graduated from Temple University with a BA degree in Asian Studies and Psychology and also possesses a Master’s degree in Anthropology from Columbia University. Her primary research interests include international students, social media, substance abuse, and 1.5 generation first-year college students.