

QUALITY AND THE NEW FLAGSHIP UNIVERSITY IDEAL IN
ASIAN HIGHER EDUCATION
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David P. Ericson
University of Hawai'i

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ABSTRACT

A singular vision has propelled higher education and ministries of education in Asia since the new millennium. It is a vision launched by the once rising tide of a globalized world order that spilled into higher education: in order to be competitive on the world scene, each Asian country had to build "World Class Universities," which could be compared and rank-ordered with the pre-eminent research universities of America, Britain and elsewhere. And if the pre-eminent American and British research universities could not be quickly surpassed, punctuated jumps up the status ladder of global higher education would establish an "heir-apparent" trajectory. Now, however, the rising tide of globalism has perhaps crested. Indeed, as some scholars of globalism and higher education point out, in certain aspects of national policy the rising tide is turning into a receding one. Nation-states are recoiling from an elite-driven, transnational world order into an "inside economy" that is concerned with its own issues of development and sustainability, quite apart from measuring itself against the rest of the world. In time, higher education in Asia is likely to follow suit. Globalism created the vision of "World Class Universities" ranked in an imitative hierarchical order; its demise suggests the need for other ideals that can drive the quest for excellence in higher education in Asia. The bedrock of educational quality for the New Flagship University in Asia is excellence in all of the forms of knowledge and understanding of human experience. The stronger the excellence in each form, the better the university's earned standing amongst its peers. But this is not a relative relationship, like the World Rankings, where worth is measured against other institutions in a game of winners and losers. Rather, it is measurement against the standards of excellence inherent in each form itself.

Keywords: New Flagship University, Quality, Asian Universities, World Class Universities, Ranking

A singular vision has propelled higher education and ministries of education in Asia since the new millennium. It is a vision launched by the once rising tide of a globalized world order that spilled into higher education: in order to be competitive on the world scene, each Asian country had to build "World Class Universities," which could be compared and rank-ordered with the pre-eminent research universities of America, Britain and elsewhere. And if the pre-eminent American and British research universities could not be quickly surpassed, punctuated jumps up the status ladder of global higher education would establish an "heir-apparent" trajectory. While such lofty status appears to be in the reach of a number of universities in the well-developed economies of Singapore, Hong Kong, and China, it is a vision that also enchants a rising country such as Vietnam. There the Ministry of Education and Training aspired to a university entrant into the top 200 by 2020 (MOET, 2020 Plan, 2012).

Now, however, the rising tide of globalism has perhaps crested. Indeed, as some scholars of globalism and higher education point out, in certain aspects of national policy the rising tide is turning into a receding one (Ramo 2012; Hawkins 2015). Nation-states are recoiling from an elite-driven, transnational world order into an "inside economy" that is concerned with its own issues of development and sustainability, quite apart from measuring itself against the rest of the world. In time, higher education in Asia is likely to follow suit. Globalism created the vision of "World Class Universities" ranked in an imitative hierarchical order; its demise suggests the need for other ideals that can drive the quest for excellence in higher education in Asia.

* This ROPS contribution is adopted from a chapter in the recent book John Aubrey Douglass and John N. Hawkins, *Envisioning the Asian New Flagship University: Its Past and Vital Future* (Berkeley Public Policy Press 2017). David P. Ericson is a Professor of Philosophy of Education and Educational Policy Studies and Chair in the Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education, and University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Prior to joining the Faculty of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in 1992, he was a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles (1979–1992) and a professor at Virginia Tech (1977–1979).

The following explores key ideas in the quest for educational excellence and the place of the New Flagship University in Asia as outlined in the *The New Flagship University: Changing the Paradigm from Global Ranking to National Relevancy* (2016) and more recently *Envisioning the Asian New Flagship University: Its Past and Vital Future* (2017). There is a need to distinguish between the relatively new status system of higher education driven by rankings of universities and educational quality in higher education. Rankings and a narrow understanding of higher education excellence can even endanger educational quality as a whole. Universities and ministries of education are better off ending the chase after high rankings entirely; esteem and recognition are the consequence of true educational quality, not the target to be pursued. There are differing meanings of 'quality' in higher education. As we shall see, the most central notion of quality can be connected to the distinct understandings in human experience in the world and the forms of knowledge we have created over eons of time to plumb their depths.

This essay concludes with a discussion on how the New Flagship ideal relates to the distinct forms of knowledge and their interweaving and applications in the world of everyday life. I argue that the pursuit of the comprehensive forms of knowledge and their applications are vital in understanding the New Flagship ideal and educational quality. A new understanding of the meaning of a "World Class University" emerges, an idea that is far more comprehensive, far more relevant to the local and regional community life that surround Flagship Universities, and far more worthy of cultivation by educators and ministries than that yielded by any measure of world rankings.

Status and Quality in Higher Education

Long ago, the sociologist David Riesman (1958) described the informal status system in American higher education as resembling a peripatetic snake. At the head of the snake were those institutions of highest status followed by institutions of increasingly lesser status as you moved down the snake to the institutions at the tail. There you might find American two-year community and junior colleges. Riesman noticed that there was a strong tendency for the institutions well down the back of the snake to aspire to the ranks of those immediately higher up. Such aspirations meant adopting the attitudes and practices of the immediately higher status institutions.

Thus, the community colleges might aspire to become four-year, baccalaureate institutions, while baccalaureate institutions might aspire to become more comprehensive colleges and universities, while these comprehensives might aspire to offering master's and doctoral degree programs, while doctoral intensive institutions might wish to join the rarified ranks of the Ivy League schools at the head of the snake. But since the serpent was constantly moving forward, this process of emulation never ceases, since the head of the snake is always forging into new territory. But what Riesman noticed here was the tendency of status seeking HEI's to move from diversity towards uniformity and what today we recognize as "mission creep" as the snake glides ahead. It is this movement of the global snake and the changing fortunes of HEIs moving up and down that the world rankings businesses seek to document on a formal annual basis.

It is the movement from diversity towards uniformity, if not mission creep, that characterizes the current Asian fascination with rising to the head of the snake. Some of its "Traditional Flagship" institutions—venerable, elite national institutions—as Douglass and Hawkins (2016) call them, and their respective ministries of education are actively attempting to emulate those institutions at the head, even though many of those institutions developed over long periods (think Oxbridge), emulating no one. Whether it is the Academic Ranking of World Universities of Shanghai Jiaotong with its emphasis on research income and expenditures, citation indices, and Nobel Laureates or the more reputational Times Higher Education World University Rankings, these institutions may end up yielding some of their traditional native strengths in pursuit of chimerical goals.

Though it may be strange to suggest it, there is no straightforward connection between high status and educational quality in higher education. Indeed, we may find some instances of HEIs which rank highly and are considered "World Class Universities," but which deliver mediocre, at best, educational activities. On the other hand, there undoubtedly are many institutions that fare poorly on the institutional rankings but which perform at a high level. How might this be?

There are those universities who, by reputation alone, attract the best and brightest students. The institution may have earned its lofty reputation in the past, but now rests on its laurels. Still, the quality of its graduates remains high, not because of anything the institution added but simply because of the entering quality of its students. Since the students have little basis to know what they have missed out on, the university might rest on its reputational laurels for a very long time, indeed. On the other hand, there are those universities of little regard in the rankings but who take in middling to undistinguished students and find a way to spark them into exceptional growth and passion for learning and ways of being in the world. It may take generations of students, if ever, for such an institution to be recognized for the quality of its programs. Generally, such universities are too focused on their students than to worry about how to inflate their image externally. In both cases, status and quality are inversely related.

Finally, and most saliently, the university world rankings can be the source of great educational damage (see Green et al. 1997; Hazelkorn 2011). By and large, the least subjective ranking systems rely heavily upon research productivity, especially in the STEM areas, citation indices, library holdings, and other faculty and student characteristics in producing their top 100 universities of the year. Insofar as good Asian universities are lured into playing the rankings game, they will be tempted to throw more and more resources into bulking up research productivity. This will inevitably lead to three ignoble outcomes: (1) the creation of a star system for research faculty where the highest university bidder pays an exorbitant salary to attract and retain academic stars, subject to raiding from other institutions “on the make” (this will cause a cascade upwards of salary demands from lesser stars); (2) the neglect of undergraduate teaching, the arts, humanities, and social sciences, as well as engagement with the surrounding community; and (3) the creation of two classes of academic citizens with inflated esteem for the first and lowered morale for the second.

Excellence in research and inquiry are, indeed, a fundamental aim of the university. But to make research—especially research income that can be harvested by only a few socially favored fields—the only goal of the university is to abdicate the university’s other vital missions in teaching and public service. If grant-seeking, income-generating research is allowed to become the measure of university greatness, then faculty will soon disdain any duties to teach and engage in service. And those intellectual, aesthetic, and kinesthetic fields that generate little or no research income will soon become educational wastelands, if they survive at all.

It surely cannot have been the intention of the world university rankings systems and kindred World Class University purveyors to wreak educational damage throughout higher education. But by focusing upon research income and expenditures and the universities considered to be in the top 20 or so in the world, Riesman’s serpentine procession beckons solid Asian universities towards the imagined snake’s head. While some of those top 20 have not forsaken teaching and public service, the skewing to income generating research is evident and troublesome as a model for emulation. One wonders what will happen to these institutions should the government grants, comprising the bulk of the income generating research, dry up.

The Deep Meaning of Quality in Higher Education

In this section of the paper, I would like to note different senses of quality when used in reference to higher education. In doing so, I will pick out one of these as fundamental and central. It provides the base for institutional excellence. In the next section, I will use this fundamental and central meaning of quality in higher education to elaborate the New Flagship University model for higher education in Asia—a model that is aspirational yet attainable, and one which does not distort the mission of higher education in the way that the world rankings do.

But first we should note that academic quality itself has and continues to be an elusive concept that defies easy measurement. For scholars, it has that aspect of being easy to recognize when we see it, but something that repels any facile attempt to measure it. As a result, we see it constantly being invoked in academic contexts, but slips away from our grasp when we attempt to pin it down. That is not surprising once we recognize that it is a highly equivocal concept that speaks to us in many voices in contemporary academic discussions.

Following Harvey and Green’s seminal discussion in “Defining’ Quality” (1993), there are at least five rather different senses of the quality concept to be found in ordinary, everyday academic contexts. Many of these uses of the term have been influenced by the growing use of business management models in the language of higher education.

Quality in higher education as:

- (1) Conformance to Specification
- (2) Fitness to Purpose
- (3) Effectiveness in Achieving Institutional Goals
- (4) Meeting Customers’ Needs and Wants
- (5) The Traditional Concept of Academic Quality

Conformance to specification as quality in higher education is clearly drawn from manufacturing. As Harvey and Green (1993, 5-6) note, it can be equated with “zero defects.” Here there is no sense of excellence being based on exclusivity or elite versus common status, rather it simply means that an ongoing educational process or program measures up to the standards that are preset. While the standards themselves may or may not be anchored in anyone’s sense of educational excellence, the educational product itself is consistently uniform and there can be checklists along the way to ensure that year after year there are no departures from what is desired. Conformance to specification provides an institutional perspective on quality, since it is the institution itself that develops the preset standards. It can then market its educational product to the public on the basis of an implied or express warrantee that the educational program proffered will live up to the presentational claims for it. Indeed, some institutions advertise a willingness to “recall” their graduates for further “servicing” if any defect is later discovered.

Fitness to Purpose, like conformance to specification, is also a non-exclusive, non-elitist notion of quality in higher education. It differs in that the purpose may either be specified by the institution or by the consumers of their education. If the offered education either does the job it was designed to do by the institution or desired by students, then we may speak of an education that meets quality in this sense.

Effectiveness in Meeting Institutional Goals and Missions as quality education is clearly a higher education institutional-generated notion. Indeed, it is one of the most common baselines used in higher education accreditation circles. Accrediting bodies typically take as given the stated mission of the institution without question, but then ask questions concerning whether the goals and practices of the institution are effective in achieving that stated mission. Secondly, efficiency issues enter into this picture (whether posed by the accrediting body or some external force such as government), since HEIs taking an inordinately lengthy time than other like institutions in educating its students in meeting its mission does raise questions about its effectiveness. Institutions that undergo and survive the accrediting process generally do tout their approval as a mark of distinction—especially if it results in a lengthy stay of the next round of the accreditation process. While accreditation approval provides a minimal level of quality approval, relative to institutional mission, it is the mainstay of the quality assurance movement in higher education. However, it says very little about whether the education is desired by anyone.

Meeting Customers' Needs and Wants is the baldly consumer-oriented notion of quality in higher education. No HEI can remain viable if the education it offers is desired by no one, and so it has its place in the language of quality in higher education. But few HEIs will admit to basing their educational decisions largely or solely on the basis of catering to potential customers—even when they try to do so in practice. This clearly mercenary approach runs counter to the supposition that higher education faculties know something more about the nature of education than their potential customers. Indeed, that supposedly is why they are there in the first place.

While higher educational administrators are left to worry about filling the seats, and so have to pay attention to institutional demand, the professors are more likely to pay attention to more elitist notions of educational excellence. Moreover, as Harvey and Green (1992, 10–12) point out, it is difficult, if not impossible, to provide an education based purely on customer needs and desires. Given their flux, and given that they have to be put through an institutional sieve of arrangements, logistics, potential resources, and projections, no institution can actually do so in practice. Coupling this with the fact that the public generally has only a vague notion of what their educational needs and wants are, HEIs generally settle for admissions demand to be the best measure of quality in this sense.

The Traditional Concept of High Academic Quality has largely rested on traditions of elitism, exclusivity, and distinctiveness, as Harvey and Green (1993) note. Here we find the conflation of two different senses of “educational excellence” in higher education both in the West and in Asia: a systemic version and an educational version, as noted by T.F. Green et al. (1997, Ch. 7). The systemic version, which tends to infect the higher education world rankings and striving for world-class universities, is based upon the notion that the best education can be defined as the education that the wealthy and social elites buy for their own children. Harvey and Green clearly allude to this in writing, “This view of quality underpins the elitist view of the high quality of an Oxbridge education.”

Quality is not determined through an assessment of what is provided but is based on an assumption that the distinctiveness and inaccessibility of an Oxbridge education is of itself “quality” (1992, 3). What is true of Oxford and Cambridge in the UK is true, as well, for the US with Harvard, Yale, and the other Ivy’s, and equally true in Asia with such institutions as the University of Tokyo, Peking University, Chulalongkorn University, and Vietnam National University-Hanoi what Douglass and Hawkins in the introduction to the book *Envisioning the Asian New Flagship University* call the “Traditional Ns” in Asia). It matters little what education these institutions offer, or whether the education offered is any good from a purely educational perspective. It matters only that the wealthy and social elite in each society traditionally want to send their own children there. That alone makes them institutions of high quality—hence highly sought after by others but accessible to only a few. The fact that they tend to be awarded more resources than other HEIs merely adds to the allure and high status of these institutions, quite apart from what they do with these additional resources. Not surprisingly, reputation bolsters their standings in most of the world rankings.

There is, however, a second traditional concept of high academic quality: the educational version of “educational excellence”—the version that I believe underwrites the connection between the New Flagship ideal and high educational quality. We may express it in the form of a question: Is there any kind of basis from which we can judge the educational quality of any educational program that grounds human beings as human beings wherever they live, whatever forms of government they have, and no matter what economic system they employ? This would be a basis independent from the whims of politicians, the desires of employers, and the predilections of students. In answer, I think there is such a basis and that it has been called many different names around the world at different times in different places, but it has to do with the full-range of human intellect and understanding in discerning our experience of the world.

In recent times, P.H. Hirst (1972) has been most noted in drawing it out in his “Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge.” Though Hirst, beckoning back to the ancient Greeks, calls it a “liberal education,” we can find it in the great intellectual and ethical traditions of the East as well as the West. In this sense, it is better to understand it as an education that stands fairly and squarely on the various forms of human knowledge and understanding. It is these forms of human knowledge and understanding—and excellence in their pursuit wherever it occurs—that underpins the New Flagship ideal.

Whatever it fully means to acquire human knowledge and understanding, it at least means, as Hirst asserts, to structure our experience of the world and ourselves by means of the conceptual frameworks we have built over the entirety of human history (1972, 12). Even before our primeval ancestors first left the savannah trees to set foot on ground, our progenitors were able to use past experience to project with some confidence the consequences of various forms of action through primitive forms of tests for accuracy and truth. Concomitant with the development and refinement of the conceptual schemata by which we structure our experience, we have developed more powerful ways of probing that experience and created the employed symbolic forms and expressions we use in their articulation. Tests of truth, justification, and method help to give objectification to the conceptual schemata, which make our experience both intelligible and accessible to others. As a result, we have built up over time ever finer distinctions in our experience that have allowed these forms of knowledge and understanding to become more distinct and differentiated from each other. Thus, we have created the disciplines of knowledge and understanding that articulate the entirety of human experience.

As these conceptual schemata have become more refined and sophisticated, and their methods of investigation and tests for truth and justification better elaborated, they have revealed that human experience is not of one piece, except to the very young. We have learned over time that the concepts, methods, and tests for significance or truth in one dimension of human experience do not carry over to the study of another. Hence the concepts, methods, and tests in the physical sciences, for example, fail to find purchase in the study of human history. Likewise, the kinds of proof found in mathematics have little to do with the concepts and tests of significance found in art or music. Though we find overlaps, and find the same tools and borrowed concepts useful in more than one form, the concepts of each form relate to each other in specific ways to create specific meanings that do not translate into the language of a different form without loss of meaning and significance.

Thus, there are a variety of forms and understanding that can only be studied in their own terms: the aesthetic (visual arts, plastic arts, music, dance, literature, etc.), the kinesthetic (including movement and dance), the ethical, the social sciences, human history, linguistics, philosophy, mathematics, religion, the life sciences, and the physical sciences. They range across distinctly the whole of human experience. Yet, for special purposes, they can form collaborations that we call interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary. This latter point will be important in understanding the New Flagship ideal in its civic commitments, as we shall see later in this paper.

For now, however, I wish to focus on the meaning of quality in relationship to the forms of knowledge and understanding themselves and the ideal of the educated person. Quite simply, the ideal of the educated person is he or she who is inducted into and comes to understand each of the distinct forms—their major concepts and field of application (ontology), their logical structures, their patterns of explanation, their methodologies, and their tests for truth, significance, and justification—in their own terms. Induction into all of the forms of knowledge and understanding is education in the broadest sense, and has variously been called “liberal education” or “education of the whole person.” It matters not where such an education exists, it matters only that some persons have been introduced to each form in its own light and come to appreciate how each one of them illuminates a different facet of human experience.

Such an education, in and of itself, gives priority to no single or group of the forms of knowledge and understanding, but simply recognizes that each one makes a contribution to human understanding writ large. It is not a specialist education, for only later concentration and study in some kind of apprenticeship with a master of a particular form will enable persons to delve deeply to reach the frontiers of the form. And it is not a utilitarian education that aims at some end beyond itself. In that sense, it is a general education dedicated to introducing the young to all of the ways that we have come to understand—over eons of time—the totality of our human experience of the world and how we have improved our understanding through the advancement of each distinct form. What is aimed at is bringing students to come to the point at which they understand what it is to think like a professional biologist or philosopher, to see the world from their perspective, but well short of their becoming biologists or philosophers. (Though, of course, a later major in biology or philosophy may create the passion to pursue these forms to their depths.)

High academic quality, in this way, is simply a function of the capacity of each academic institution to enable young people to enter into and grasp the significance and reach of each form of knowledge as far as possible for as many forms as possible. This, of course, means that there must be corresponding faculties containing masters of each form who can provide the teaching and learning opportunities to make this possible. As we shall see, the quality of teaching and learning in general education over the

whole range of human experience is of utmost importance in the ideal of the Flagship University. While research at the frontiers of the forms is a high function of these universities, it is not the only function. Flagships are research universities (and so are different than purely liberal arts colleges), but they must prize their teaching legacy in introducing their students into the forms in equal measure.

Research intensity complements the teaching excellence that is to be found in the best Flagship Universities. Once again, the forms of knowledge and understanding comprise the basis for research excellence and the formation of faculties dedicated to their development and propagation. Comprehension of the forms themselves provides a continuum from neophyte to expert in the striving for educational excellence within each form. At the expert level within a form, further excellence is evident in the work of those thinkers and researchers who advance the frontiers of each form through insight and discovery through research and inquiry appropriate to the form. Thus, the various faculties devoted to the forms themselves are the mainstay of these important institutions. But as we shall see, Flagships do not stop with the forms themselves, for they are engaged with the life of their surrounding communities, which betokens both professional and interdisciplinary studies.

Now there are many excellent HEIs, which specialize in only a few of the forms of knowledge and understanding. Think, for example, of a Caltech or MIT, each of which is a perennial contender for the top of the world rankings. While they are doubtless “world class” in their fields of specialization, there are a number of reasons why they cannot be candidates for the ideal of the Flagship University. One of the reasons is that they specialize in mathematics, the physical sciences, and the life sciences. And they are indeed world class in each of these forms and do a wonderful job of taking already gifted students in these areas and provide educational experiences that allow them to grow ever closer to the cutting edge of research in these forms. It is precisely this specialization, however, that eliminates their consideration as New Flagship Universities.

Flagships, by their very nature, must be comprehensive and range over the entirety of human experience, not just a handful of facets. And quality is in good part a measure of both breadth and depth in teaching, something that research-intensive universities must be ever mindful of. For there is a tendency of Flagships as research universities to over-reward research, given the siren song of world rankings. Regretfully, some soon discover that the pull of research has led to the neglect of undergraduate teaching. What is wanted is balance between teaching and research, and faculty highly committed to both.

The Ideal of The New Flagship University—Civic and Social Purpose

Excellence in teaching and research with respect to the basic forms of knowledge and understanding are defining characteristics of the best Flagship Universities. But there is a further critical function in the ideal of the New Flagship University that Douglass (2016) notes that is crucial in developing and evaluating these institutions: a component of committed service to the surrounding community. These universities by their very nature are not merely embedded within a regional or national system of higher education; they are also embedded deeply within the ongoing life of their community or region. Far from building up walls between the institution and their surrounding community, the ideal of the New Flagship University embraces the role of service to the community as only a committed, comprehensive institution can.

As Douglass (2016) states: “Leading national universities are now more important for socioeconomic mobility, for producing economic and civic leaders, for knowledge production, and for pushing innovation and societal self-reflection than any other time in their history.” He also notes that leading national universities, if they are doing their job, “are constantly expanding their activities in response to societal demands, generating new avenues of research and discovery, and expanding their reach into most aspects of modern life. The net result is that the Flagship Universities of today are significantly different from the leading national universities of an earlier age.”

Flagship Universities first emerged out of federal policy in 1862 in the United States with the founding of secular public universities by the various states, especially in the less settled Midwestern and Western states, through the granting of federally-controlled lands to the states for the purpose of expanding higher education opportunities to the citizens of that young country (hence the term ‘land grant institution’). But the higher education opportunities envisioned in federal policy were far different than those found in the elite, private, generally sectarian universities found on the eastern seaboard (think Ivy League that imitated the ancient British universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and St. Andrews). These were higher education opportunities extended to the “common man” with a distinct purpose of advancing agriculture, the industrial arts, and the new professions that went well beyond, though included, study of the forms of knowledge and understanding (Douglass 2016, 38–51).

Thus, with the founding of such great public universities as Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, California, and Washington in the 19th century, open to talented men and women of all backgrounds and social classes, we see a certain democratization of higher education in the United States. But it was also a democratization of purpose insofar as these institutions were founded to serve the full-range of civic and social life in their regions, not just elitist values.

As these great public universities began to mature and prosper in the 20th century and their campuses began to swell with students seeking the higher learning that they offered, the demand for higher education in America continued at a greater pace, especially after World War II. With rates of high school completion moving past 60 percent of the age cohort in 1955 and with half again of these wanting to move into higher education, the demand outstripped the capacity of what these burgeoning campuses could supply. So, in pace with population increase and demand for higher education, the states began creating new HEIs to meet the influx of new students, while retaining the main campus at the apex of the state system of higher education.

At this time, we began to see a clear and distinct mission differentiation among these institutions. The main campus adopted the mantle of a research university, while the new campuses, often starting out as normal schools for the training of teachers, preoccupied themselves with teaching undergraduates. To this mix was added the American community college that serves as something of a safety-valve function in lessening pressure on the principle of selectivity that characterizes four-year institutions in America. Except through the non-selective two-year community college, which admits all, selectivity of students could be maintained above (see Ericson and Robertshaw 1982). Indeed, the Flagship University of the system could become even more selective in their student body in differentiation from the new teaching campuses, though pressure to meet the needs of the state tempers any drive towards the elitism of the Ivy's.

The long-standing tradition within the forms of knowledge and understanding of addressing one's peers wherever they may be in the world remains one of the most respected practices in the academy. As stewards of this tradition, we find historians writing for other historians, philosophers writing for other philosophers, and physicists writing for other physicists. Of course, as the forms have been refined and elaborated over time, they have been further sub-divided through specialization with focused journals as a means of scholarly communication and particular and distinct associations of inquirers. The old community of scholars has become a virtual plethora of smaller communities focused upon a single branch of the full form itself. And while the ideal of the Flagship University readily embraces research and inquiry into the forms themselves, new patterns and kinds of research have emerged that responds to the public purpose for which these universities were founded. These are new patterns and kinds of research that intertwine with the teaching and service missions of the modern public university.

Education for the professions is a natural part of the New Flagship University, since it directly impacts the lifeblood of the surrounding community. Though deriving from and building upon the base of the forms of knowledge and understanding, professional schools and colleges mark the difference between the mere survival of society and its positive enhancement. They represent social interests whose advancement makes life worth living. Thus, professional education in agriculture, law, medicine, engineering, education, business, architecture, and social work are but a few of the basic professions that advance society. But so, too, are music, dance, drama, and art that draw upon and speak to the aesthetic dimension of human experience without which human life is impoverished. Now professional education, in general, carries little in the way of direct impact in advancing the forms of knowledge and understanding themselves.

However, in advancing the professions and the problems of society they minister to, they bring the insights of theory in the basic forms to issues of everyday life in their community. In this way, basic knowledge and understanding in the forms gets applied in creative ways to social life. Hence in the best professional schools and colleges, faculty will have a deep understanding of one or more of the forms of knowledge and understanding and an ability to relate that understanding to the profession and its practice.

Take, for example, one of the most complex professions: education. While it may seem to be simple matter to teach something to someone, the actual complexity and scale of it is found in the setting of national educational systems where millions must be educated. So, the profession of education draws upon psychology and the social sciences, the humanities, human development and brain sciences in biology, while built on the ethical and the philosophical at its base. But it also must draw upon derived areas of the law and administrative theory, practice, and budgeting. Moreover, faculty in teacher preparation and professional development must have fair grounding in the forms of knowledge and understanding underlying each school subject, since without it, you can't really teach it. And finally, there is the theoretical and practical problem of taking disciplinary knowledge and understanding and transforming it in a way that is comprehensible to a classroom of 25–40 young people. Multiply each classroom by millions around the world, subject to arbitrary edicts, policies, and ministries of education, and we wonder why education is so difficult and the outcome so in doubt.

But this points to another issue concerning the Flagship University and public service. It is simply the fact that social problems and issues rarely present themselves in the garb of a single form of knowledge and understanding. The problems and prospects of society generally span multiple forms at the same time. The Flagship University, engaged as it is with its region of service, must encourage and reward faculty to work beyond their disciplinary form.

The scholarship of social engagement must be interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary in form. Now, obviously, not every faculty member of the Flagship should be working across the boundaries of the individual forms to illuminate and help

solve social issues and problems. But a critical mass is needed to engage the community both at the level of multidisciplinary scholarship or in the field itself—whether by teams or individuals. This can best be done by ensuring that tenure and promotion policies recognize and celebrate scholarly contributions to the professions and to the solution of community problems as much as we celebrate scholarly advances to the forms themselves.

Moreover, we need to recognize and celebrate some of the newer forms of scholarship that seem to depart from certain scholarly conventions. I have in mind, in particular, the art of policy research and analysis, an art that is so germane to addressing community problems and prospects. Frequently, the social value of policy research and analysis is inversely related to its scholarly cogency. In the search for truth, the dimension of time is rarely an important variable. Surpassingly good scholarship demands that we muster as much evidence in favor of a claim or theory even if it takes another day, another month, or another year. In policy research and analysis—with the possible exception of policy evaluation—we seldom have the luxury of time to await the conclusive data. The urgency for decision on the policy problem often necessitates bringing as much rationality and evidence—as much of the forms of knowledge and understanding—to bear on the problem as possible knowing that it is always short of what is desirable (see Green 1994). It is better to have a timely intervention in human affairs than to have the affairs settle themselves in the worst possible way through delay.

Contemporary Asian Universities and the New Flagship Ideal

Many of the contemporary universities recognized as “Traditional Flagship Universities” in China, Japan, South Korea, and Southeast Asia such as Peking University, Tokyo University, Seoul National University, and Vietnam National University-Hanoi, have long catered to their own internal needs and development, while maintaining their place at the top of the university status hierarchy in their respective countries. As demand for entrance into these traditional universities grew, they maintained their selectivity while opening their doors to those beyond the social and political elite. High entrance exam scores became the new sought after currency of a new meritocratic elite. Under pressure, however, from the forces of globalization and internationalization, ministries of education began to look for external validation of their quality and worth.

A sudden status anxiety within these universities, stirred by ministerial ambition, has made them easy prey for the eager clutches of the world rankings to provide testament to their value. Unfortunately, the narrow measures of the world rankings in terms of research income and scholarly citation indices may push them in the opposite direction of becoming less valuable to the societies they serve.

The world rankings metric, based on research income and research expenditures, is itself based on a foundation of sand. By far the largest percentage of funded research for universities comes from government, especially at the national level. But with the end of an era of globalization and economic integration in sight, with declining national and world growth rates, and with the astronomical increase of national debt in the US, the UK, Europe, Japan, and China, national government research budgets are certain to stagnate, if not drop absolutely. Though many argue that national research budgets contain the seed stock of future national growth that must be protected come what may, it is politically naïve to expect national research budgets to remain constant when policy makers are faced with restive populations left behind by a globalization that has exacerbated inequality, rather than eliminated it as promised. As governments and central banks piled on debt in a vain attempt to resuscitate economic growth rates, it now appears that they have dug a deeper hole that will only prolong economic weakness amid calls for rising trade protectionist and mercantilist policies.

If our understanding of globalism is under transformation, can we expect the world rankings/world class university movement to falter for globalism itself gave rise to that movement? It was a mistake from the beginning for Asian policy makers and university leaders to join Riesman’s reptilian procession and seek to imitate the cluster of universities, especially in the US and the UK, at the head of the snake. That is the “status model,” not the “educational model” of university greatness and quality. We should not confuse the two. Indeed, university greatness in both senses is far more likely to be achieved by following the educational model of university development rather than apishly following the status model.

It is not too late for Asian universities to be innovators in creating new paths to university quality and greatness that rest in part on the educational heritage and intellectual traditions that are endemic to Asia. And this regardless of the waxing and waning of world economic integration. While excellence in the teaching of and research in all the forms of knowledge and understanding is of crucial importance to quality in higher education, it is important to consider areas of “comparative advantage” for special notice. Though China, for example, has a distinguished, ancient history of empirical work and technological achievement in the physical sciences, the theoretical developments of that form of knowledge and understanding in the West beginning in the 16th and 17th centuries allowed western nations to advance that form and its technological accompaniment immeasurably in comparison. It is only now in the 21st century that Chinese science and engineering are beginning to catch up with, and perhaps surpass, theoretical development of that form.

Certainly, if the numbers of students and focused attention on STEM subjects in Chinese universities are any indication, then we may soon expect such a result. But there are other forms of knowledge and understanding in which Eastern thought has excelled at the highest levels. I have in mind the development of how we should live together as human beings—the ethical, the social, and the political dimensions—as developed in Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist, and Islamic thought, (many of these seep into the differing forms of philosophy and religion), and refined advancements in aesthetics and the arts (think of the Japanese high arts and dance in Southeast Asia).

It is unfortunate that the status model has valorized three forms of knowledge and understanding—the physical sciences, the biological sciences, and mathematics—beyond their readily acknowledged importance, since all of the forms are central to the human condition and experience. Yet I single out the ethical, the social, philosophy, religion, and the arts for special attention by Asian universities seeking to innovate new paths to university quality and greatness, since by heritage and tradition Asian thought has done so much to develop and elaborate them.

Deep contribution to the life of the surrounding community and region is a further area that the New Asian Flagship University may wish to play in the future. Indeed, several models along these lines of the New Asian Flagship are now emerging in China and Vietnam that I can draw attention to. Beyond the traditional Asian Flagships of Peking University and Vietnam National University, we have seen the rise of Zhejiang University in China and Thai Nguyen University in Thai Nguyen, Vietnam. What is remarkable about Zhejiang and Thai Nguyen is the manner of integration into and the part they play in their surrounding communities.

Though Zhejiang University has roots as old as Peking University back into the 19th century and an equally distinguished academic history, it did not attain its current form until 1998 when Zhejiang University joined with three other local universities—Hangzhou University, Zhejiang Agricultural University, and Zhejiang Medical University—to become the new Zhejiang University. Each of these parts were well-rooted in the local economy and culture of Hangzhou City and Zhejiang Province and made strong contributions, each in their own way, to the surrounding community. But together they represent a new intellectual and scientific powerhouse of a comprehensive university that can leverage its estimable parts into new academic, technical, agricultural, health, economic, and cultural realities and relationships that serve the region and China as a whole.

Moreover, the new Zhejiang University has spawned or provided leadership for a number of new or growing local and regional colleges and universities. In this way, it acts similarly to a state higher education system Flagship University in the US. As clearly a world class university (in the best sense), it remains tethered to its region by the remarkable fact that about 50 percent of its funding comes from Zhejiang provincial government, not just the national Ministry of Education. The new Zhejiang University meets most of the criteria for New Asian Flagship University status.

Like Zhejiang University, Thai Nguyen University was formed of five other universities in Thai Nguyen Province in 1994 that focused on engineering, education, agriculture and forestry, economics and technology, and medicine. At this time, it is not nearly as well developed and comprehensive as Zhejiang, but its integration into the community and its strategic trajectory is likely headed towards the New Asian Flagship University model. As such, it may serve as a guidepost and beacon for other less developed universities in Southeast Asia.

Thai Nguyen University is situated in the most northeastern region of Vietnam, amidst mountains, forests, plateaus, and verdant valleys on the border with China. It is home to the largest concentration of ethnic minority peoples in Vietnam with nearly 55 percent of its surrounding population speaking a non-Viet (or Kinh) first language. Beyond its current academic development at the bachelors, masters, and doctoral levels, Thai Nguyen is mandated to engage the entire region in development activities. Phan (2016) puts it well, Thai Nguyen University is, “regarded highly for [its] community engagement and regional economic capacity. At the same time, compared to other research intensive and high profile universities in Vietnam, Thai Nguyen University . . . has been proactive in initiating and cultivating international engagement activities with ASEAN countries.” As Phan notes, “The University pays attention to social mobility among students coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds in these countries while doing the same thing to its own students in rural areas in Vietnam.” The internationalist perspective of Thai Nguyen and its own close attention to its regional development mandate (and distance from Hanoi), both rather unique in Vietnam, mark out the university as one to watch for the future.

One further aspect of both Zhejiang University and Thai Nguyen University deserve comment. Most of the Traditional Flagship Universities are hemmed in by their ministries of education or other controlling parties, suffer from political mandates from on high, and lack sufficient governance autonomy to mark out their own future. Zhejiang University is somewhat insulated from China’s Ministry of Education by three factors. First, there is the illustrious academic history that arose in the four parts independently prior to their merger. The successful integration of them and the leverage created by their merger has shielded Zhejiang from bureaucratic interference. Second, the geographical distance from Beijing provides some degrees of freedom that even Peking University, Tsinghua University, and Renmin University do not enjoy. And third, there is the fact that Zhejiang Province fully matches

the funding of the university provided through the Ministry. This gives Zhejiang University an unparalleled ability to navigate between the shores of its two major funding sources.

As for Thai Nguyen University, though in easy driving distance from Hanoi, it seems a world away from the Ministry of Education and Training. With its mandate to uplift the entire surrounding border and heavily ethnic minority region, even the ministry mandarins of Hanoi hesitate to intervene in this somewhat unfamiliar area of Vietnam. For the future, Thai Nguyen University may find that it can wrest more freedom from bureaucratic control to plot its own future.

Quality and Asia's Leading National Universities

The emerging model of the New Flagship University in Asia must be first and foremost an educational model founded on educational quality. If it merely emulates the status model as found in the current understanding of World Rankings and the World Class University movements, it will merely recreate an unsustainable vision of chasing external research funding for the sake of chasing external research funding.

The New Flagship University will, indeed, feature high level research and inquiry to go along with a renewed purpose for invigorated teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels. It is, above all, a high research institution. But it does not measure its worth in research income and expenditures. With recognition that available external research funding is variable and effervescent across fields over time, it places equal regard on funded and unfunded high-quality research and inquiry.

The bedrock of educational quality for the New Flagship University in Asia is excellence in all of the forms of knowledge and understanding of human experience. The stronger the excellence in each form, the better the university's earned standing amongst its peers. But this is not a relative relationship, like the World Rankings, where worth is measured against other institutions in a game of winners and losers. Rather, it is measurement against the standards of excellence inherent in each form itself.

Out of this bedrock of educational quality—teaching, learning, research, and inquiry in each form—the New Flagship University brings the forms of knowledge and understanding to bear on the problems, hopes, and future of its surrounding community. Since these problems, hopes, and future rarely, if ever, wear the garb of a single form, the New Asian Flagship University engenders a plethora of interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary research and teaching across multiple forms. The excellence and quality of this research and teaching depends not merely on the way the individual forms are employed and combined, but on the real-world effect on addressing and helping to solve the current problems and create new possibilities of community life. Thus, the educational model of the New Asian Flagship University, embedded in its social, economic, and cultural region and relations with other schools and colleges, serves as beacon not merely to that region, but to the nation and the world at large.

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