

Conceptualising Higher Education Asianization: ASIANur

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Abstract: Higher Education (HE) plays an active role in nation building by developing and transforming the human capital holistically. This lifelong endeavour is by no means smooth sailing as HEs have to face many challenges. One prominent challenge is of university ranking, which is highly Westernized and exceedingly quantitative. “Creatical thinking” and “Asianization” concepts were thus forged in formulating “ASIANur”, an Asian university ranking. The justifications for ASIANur are based on Asian countries’ strength in relation to their economic, demographic, strength of HE as well as the emerging systematizing and standardizing of research disseminations. The possibility of Asian Higher Education Century is strengthened when ASIANur is materialised.

Keywords: Asianization, ASIANur, Creatical thinking, Higher education, Human capital.

1. Introduction

The inception of Higher Education system in Malaysia is based on the Philosophy of Education, formulated in 1988. It emphasises an ongoing effort to produce holistic citizens to enhance nation building. Ministry of Education (MOE), the body that governs Malaysian education system defined Higher Education (HE) as “the direction or preparing of a course of study prompting the honour of an endorsement, certificate or degree upon the successful fulfilment thereof” in the document of Private Higher Educational Institution Act (1996: 13). The development of public and/or private HE entities under the flagship of HE is reflective of the country’s socioeconomic situation and developmental aspirations. The flagship of Malaysian HE is also reflected in Asia. HE plays a vital role in propelling Asia forward, in collaboration with political and economical entities from the entire Asian regions. Nonetheless, Asian HE is much of the time engulfed in the bitter battle of global ranking. Thus, this paper is to look into the possibility of formulating ASIANur that measure “up to global standards while meeting local needs” (Bhandari, 2015: n.p.)

2. The Context

The importance of HE is undisputable to a country and her people in the form of nation building concept. HE provides a transformational element in the form of greater development to the country and invaluable experience to the people. The development of cognitive skills and human capital give assistance to Malaysia to progress more rapidly and holistically. HE is set to develop not just the graduates’ skills and training for their career but also their humane development. Itle Clark, in the Academy for prosocial Learning website defines humane learning as “Humane education encourages cognitive, affective, and behavioural growth through personal development of critical thinking, problem

solving, perspective-taking, and empathy as it relates to people, animals, the planet, and the intersections among them. Education taught through the lens of humane pedagogy supports more than knowledge acquisition, it allows learners to process personal values and choose prosocial behaviours aligned with those values.” This concept of Human Education is seen as a bridge to balance the development of education in relation to technological development and value education.

The fostering of learning atmosphere by means of discourse and exposure to new or different ideas, cultures and way of thinking is of utmost importance, alongside with quality assurance of education (Azlan Philip Kinjawan, Yuen Fook & Jamian, 2020). The aspiration is for this learning to be lifelong so the individual and the country could keep on progressing. This progress in HE is to be transpired via the two HE blueprints introduced by MOE. The first is the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) beyond 2020 and the second is the National Higher Education Action Plan (NHEAP) 2007–2010. The strategic plan of the blueprints encompasses four phases as follows: (1) Laying the foundation (2007–2010) (2) Strengthening and enhancement (2011–2015) (3) Excellence (2016–2020) (4) Glory and sustainability (beyond 2020).

However, achieving the aspirations is by no means smooth sailing. There are many challenges to the present situation of HE and one that prevails the most is in term of University ranking which is largely based on Western concepts. This is aptly voiced by Rajika Bhandari “Today, professional accomplishments of institutions and faculty are based on a system of merit that is largely Western based, with Western criteria and metrics that often place non-Western systems at a disadvantage, especially those Asian countries where English—the lingua franca of scientific innovation and enterprise—is not one of the dominant languages.” (2015, n.p.)

Though English has been acknowledged as a global language, to be proficient in the language has its own challenges. The nuances of the language either in reading and writing play a major role in the learning process for the knowledge on nuances is normally taken as one of higher cognitive ability. The challenge in relation to English as a language of Western academe is further heightened as the nitty gritty of an academic writing has to be fulfilled. This is made even harder when the reviewers of the articles written are of Western background. Other languages used in the publication domain are normally not highly considered in the Western university ranking system. This is one criteria that has to be delved into by academicians and non-academicians alike.

There is quite a number of international university ranking systems available such as Center for World University Rankings, Leiden Ranking, Global University Ranking and a few others. However, three of the most prominent university ranking organizations are Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings and Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings. The performance indicators and weights used in the three international university ranking systems are presented in Table 1 (UNESCO, 2014: p. 114)

Table 1. Indicators And Weights Used In The Three International University Ranking Systems

Ranking system	Criteria	Indicator	Weight
Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)	Quality of Faculty	Staff of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	20%
		Highly cited researchers in 21 broad subject categories	20%
	Research Output	Papers published in Nature and Science*	20%
		Papers indexed in Science Citation Index-expanded and Social Science Citation Index	20%
	Per Capita Performance	Per capita academic performance of an institution	10%
	Quality of Education	Alumni of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	10%
Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings	Academic reputation	QS Global Academic Survey	40%
	Employer reputation	QS Global Employer Survey	20%
	Citations	Citations per faculty	20%
	Teaching quality	Faculty student ratio	10%
	Internationalization	Proportion of faculty members that are international	5%
		Proportion of students that are international	5%
Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings	Teaching	Academic reputation survey (teaching)	15%
		Staff-to-student ratio	4.5%
		Doctoral to bachelor's degrees awarded	6%
		Number of doctorates awarded	2.25%
		Institutional income scaled per academic	2.25%
	Research	Academic reputation survey (research)	18%
		University research income	6%
		Number of papers published in the academic journals indexed by Thomson Reuters per academic	6%
		Citations	Citations (5 years)
	Industry income	Industry income	2.5%
	International outlook	Ratio of international to domestic students	2.5%
		Ratio of international to domestic staff	2.5%
		Proportion of a university's total research journal publications that have at least one international co-author and reward higher volumes	2.5%

Sources: Academic Ranking of World Universities, QS World Universities Rankings and Times Higher Education World University Rankings.

Methodically, all three systems are quantitatively driven. The qualitative element is either nonexistence or not made apparent. William Bruce Cameron (1963) in his book states that 'Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts'. This should spark a round of debate as quality is not of only those tangible but also the intangible. What lay beneath the surface matters. This is in line with the vision, mission and values of many higher education institutions whereby the success is not only in producing knowledgeable graduates in their specific field, but also graduates who are holistically balanced in values. This is conveyed via the mission, vision and values of selected universities in the Asian region to exemplify the point (Table 2).

Table 2. Selected Asian Universities' Values (accessed on 2 March 2020)

University	Values
National University of Singapore	<i>innovation, resilience excellence, respect, integrity</i>
Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	Excellence, Integrity, and Academic Freedom Global Vision and Local Commitment Can-do Spirit
Indian institute of Technology Bombay	<i>Inclusiveness, Diversity, and Respect</i> The core values adopted by the Institute as enduring principles are <i>Integrity, Excellence, Accountability, Transparency, and Empathy.</i>
The University of Tokyo	The University of Tokyo aims to nurture global leaders with <i>a strong sense of public responsibility and a pioneering spirit, possessing both deep specialism and broad knowledge.</i> The University of Tokyo aims to expand the boundaries of human knowledge in partnership with society.
Seoul National University	Building an Innovative Ecosystem of Knowledge <i>Creating Knowledge-based Social Values</i>
Universiti Teknologi MARA	Excellence Synergy Integrity

The importance of what lay beneath the surface matters to the context of university ranking. The intangible is as important as the tangible. Thus, the inclusion of intangible dimension is essential in the ranking system for HE is not only about product but human development too. Therefore, there is a need for further deliberation in addressing this subjective judgement.

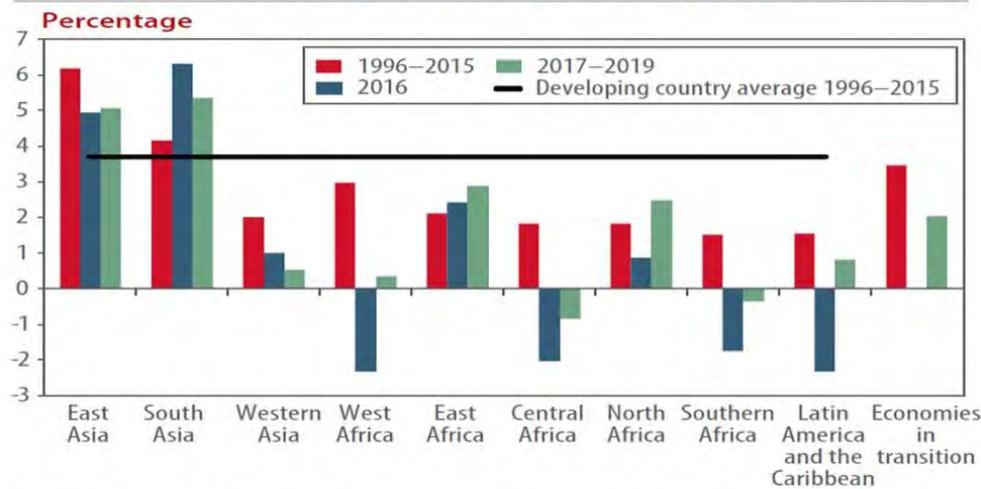
The reliability and validity of these two existing ranking systems (THE and QS) in Malaysia and to a larger ASEAN as well as ASIAN context may need reassessment. As much as universities are global entities (Eng Chye, 2008), they are more importantly a local entity that serves the need of the local people first before the international. With this in mind, there is a need for a “creatical thinking” (Anoop Swarup, 2019) to forecast a more meaningful future for the ASIAN university. The term Creatical thinking is defined as “A blend of critical and creative thinking in a single integrated approach to problem finding and solving that emphasizes students' ability to not only think critical about other people's ideas, but also to produce new, creative ideas of their own.” (Ohler, 2013: p. 44). In the book “The Future is Asian”, Parag Khanna made a strong point by saying “ If the nineteenth century featured the Europeanization of the world, and the twentieth century its Americanization, then the twenty-first century is the time of Asianization.” (2019, p. 1). Khanna further elaborated that Asianization is to mean “greater economic and political interdependence between Asian countries, and a return to a historical multipolarity, where no single nation has hegemonic dominance of the region.” The thinking is for Asia as to be the first rather than to be the follower of others. It is therefore suggested for Asian HE to have its own university ranking apart from utilizing the existing global ranking systems (Cramer, Yoo & Manning, 2019).

3. ASIANur

This “creatical thinking” and “Asianization” concept could well be presented in HE sphere via an ASIAN university ranking. It could be conceptualised as ASIANur. It uses an ASIAN mould with the word ASIA to represent the continent and Nur to mean “light” in the HE entity. This is the right time, not just for consideration but for implementation (if there is ever an existing system). There are a few justifications to support the need for ASIANur.

The first, economic strength of Asian. The outlook for economic development of Asia is bright. Figure 1 shows the average annual GDP per capita growth by region. Putting together the GDP of East Asia, South Asia and Western Asia exemplifies the strength of Asian countries economic strength. This could have a trickle down effect on HE by means of allocation for the overall spending including research and development. Further deliberation of the economic strength shows more middle income group who are likely to spend more in education as education is highly regarded.

Average annual GDP per capita growth by region



Source: United Nations, *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2018*.

Fig.1 Average Annual GDP per Capita Growth by Region (Source: United Nations, World Economic Situation and Prospects 2018)

The second is demographic strength of Asian. Asian has dominated the world population and ranked first for the last decade and the forecast of the population shows for Asia to remain in the first rank for the next three decades (Table 3).

Table 3. Asia Population Forecast
(Source: Worldometer)

Year	Population	Yearly % Change	Yearly Change	Fertility Rate	Urban Population	World Pop	World Population	Asia's Share of World Pop	World Rank
2020	4,641,054,775	0.92 %	41,515,883	2.15	2,361,464,416	62.9 %	7,794,798,739	1	
2025	4,822,629,455	0.77 %	36,314,936	2.18	2,589,655,469	61.9 %	8,184,437,460	1	
2030	4,974,091,861	0.62 %	30,292,481	2.22	2,802,261,893	60.8 %	8,548,487,400	1	
2035	5,096,362,035	0.49 %	24,454,035	2.24	2,998,511,347	57.3 %	8,887,524,213	1	
2040	5,188,948,607	0.36 %	18,517,314	2.25	3,176,508,579	58.4 %	9,198,847,240	1	
2045	5,253,195,095	0.25 %	12,849,298	2.27	3,335,589,401	57.1 %	9,481,803,274	1	
2050	5,290,263,118	0.14 %	7,413,605	2.30	3,479,058,559	55.8 %	9,735,033,990	1	

The strength in numbers could then be translated to the strength in capacity (Figure 2). Asian could fill the number of students in HE straightforwardly as the distribution of the youth population up to 2060 remains high, comparatively speaking to other regions of the world. This is the age ready population for HE. Although the issue on trend of continuing HE outside of region is still present, the perspective is of minority and majority. A small fraction is likely to keep doing so while the majority is to opt for within the region. The introduction of ASIANur is hoped to convince people and industry players to believe that HE within the region is able to provide among the best human capital. This could help in blurring the concept that western human capital is always the best.

Fig. 2 Distribution of Youth Aged 15 – 24, by region, 1950 to 2060.
(Source: United Nations (2013) World Population Prost: the 2012 Revision)

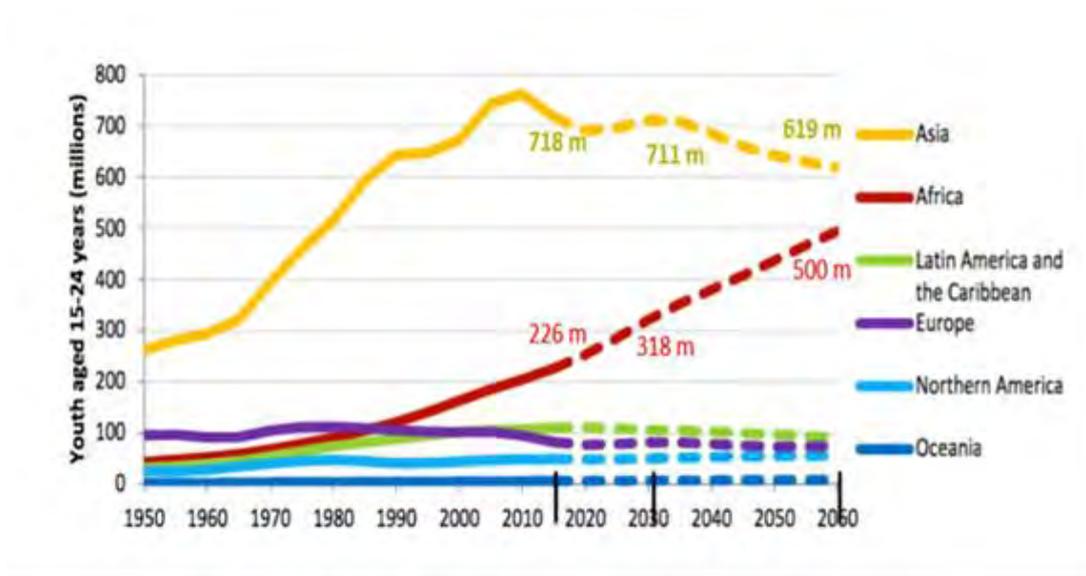


Fig. 2 Distribution of Youth Aged 15 – 24, by region, 1950 to 2060.
(Source: United Nations (2013) World Population Prospect: the 2012 Revision)

The third is existing HE strength of Asian. This is exemplified by Asian university alliance (AUA) with its 15 founding members. AUA missions are AUA will increase the accessibility of educational resources among member institutions in an effort to cultivate future leading talents.

- AUA will serve as a platform for an innovative collaboration ecosystem between academia, government, and industry.
- AUA will enhance existing ties and facilitate new links among member institutions and foster a multicultural learning environment, specifically through increased educational and research and exchanges.

The first criteria in becoming a member of AUA, as stated in the website is that geographically the applicant university must be a university located in Asia. ASIANur could tap on this existing establishment to kickstart the movement. Another Asian HE strength is in term of keeping tab with HE research assessment. The example is the Malaysian Research Assessment Instrument (MyRA) which has been in used since its conception in 2006. MyRA uses a 6-Star rating system and a panel of trained auditors Document-audit and Site-audit all participating HE. This assessment system is an evidence of the Asian HE competency in to be the trend setter in producing better ranking systems and procedure implementation.

The fourth is emerging systematizing and standardizing procedure in the light of COVID-19 Pandemic. This pandemic has created many new dimensions to the world of HE. Universities across Asia are learning many valuable lessons in managing the teaching and learning, management and leadership of their institutions. This is, to a certain extent, is a plus point as it helps to strengthen the HE existence to the recent need of university learning. This is intensified even further by some bolder step taken by some ministries of the Asian countries. This is exemplified by the General Office of the

State Council of China that released The Scientific Data Management Measures. Through two of her ministries, namely, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Science and Technology, effort are multiplied to lessen their reliance on Science Citation Index (SCI), a Philadelphia and London-based company owned by Clarivate Analytics. In a 2018 conference, President Xi Jinping (as cited in Guillermo J Creus, March 21, 2020) mentioned that “academic standards in higher education institutions could not just be led by Western standards and stressed that China should have its own academic standards and norms. The aim was to establish an evaluation system to stimulate research that could be used to solve Chinese problems.” The contribution of research is to be assessed more on their impact on society and country rather than the SCI. The dissemination of the research findings is via a nationally open repository. The forward move and experience of China could be a mould for the systematizing and standardizing the management of scientific data and publication of ASIANur university ranking system

These strengths of Asian economic, demographic and existing HE demonstrate and confirm for the need to develop ASIANur in the nearest future possible. This ASIANur innovation is an example of “disruptive innovation” (Clayton M. Christensen 1997). Disruptive innovation is “an innovation that creates a new market and value network and eventually disrupts an existing market and value network, displacing established market-leading firms, products, and alliances” (Ab Rahman, Airini, et al, 2017: p. 112).

The approach to this innovative disruption could be carried out by adopting Kotter 8-step model for change (2014) in his book *Innovate*. The 8-step model is presented in Figure 3. This paper has thus taken the first step in presenting the urgency and capability of Asian HE to spear heading an Asian mould university ranking.



Fig. 3 Kotter 8-step Model for Change

4. Conclusion

HE in Malaysia, ASEAN and ASIA is continuously in demand among the population as the future outlook could well depend on it. The recent term “the Asian Higher Education Century” (Altbach, 2015) shows the pertinent role Asian is playing in the education sphere. ASIANur could be the lifeline for hybridising and strengthening HE in Asia. The possibility of transpiring this theory to praxis is enormously strong and one of the strongest approach is through ASIANur and thus making it possible for Asian Higher Education Century to materialise.

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