

Book Review:

Christopher Hill and Rozilini M.

Fernandez-Chung.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE ASIAN CENTURY: THE EUROPEAN LEGACY AND THE FUTURE OF TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION IN THE ASEAN REGION, ROUTLEDGE, 2017. 172 PP., ISBN: 978-1-315-73637-2 (EBK)

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As goes the education in a country, particularly higher education, so too goes the success of many factors that affect life there: the economy, level of technology, societal issues, individual and collective prosperity and a country's move toward internationalization. *Higher education in the Asian century: The European legacy and the future of transnational education in the ASEAN region* explores the history of the member nations of ASEAN. The legacy of educational progress is derived from their colonial experience and foreign ties and the effects that these relationships may have had on each country. Specifically, the book examines how a tool of higher education, Transnational Education (TNE), the movement of programs of study, students and teachers across international borders, has been and is being used in each country involved in attempts to attain governmental, societal, and higher education-related goals.

The editors are Christopher Hill, an Associate Professor and Director of the Doctoral Training Center, British University, Dubai. Hill is a member of several international HE associations, has published widely and has worked extensively in the field of TNE. His co-editor, Rozilini M. Fernandez-Chung is the Vice President for Quality Assurance at HELP University, Malaysia and in that role provides policy formulation, process support advice and quality assurance activities. She has served in roles that resulted in the development of the Malaysian Qualifications Framework, its codes of practice and program standards and guidelines. Together, the book's two editors, solicited papers from "informed experts" in which pairs, and in one case three of these experts provided a country-based case-study discussion forming the eight chapters of the book. ASEAN countries examined include Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, the Philippines and Myanmar.

The authors of the chapters bring to bear excellent credentials and many years in higher education (HE), HE administration, TNE, banking, consulting and government to provide a highly informative and compelling scholarly work. Though the book is a bit dry, as scholarly works are apt to be, each chapter provides the reader with a vivid picture of what has transpired over hundreds of years and how it has shaped and continues to shape the country and its higher educational system. At the onset, the editors state that it is not the intention of the book to suggest answers to future problems for the countries examined, but rather to provide insights

into past performance and how this led to the current circumstance in each country. Key in this exploration is a starting point of colonization by European countries for all but one of the nations examined (Thailand) and how this European-Asian connection resulted in legacies of educational systems, administration, language and religion that still affects those countries' HE today.

This legacy in HE is extremely important, according to the authors in that HE is considered a factor that has possibly the highest impact on a nation, its society, its politics and its economy. This, therefore, makes HE a major policy issue for these countries and a source for national development and reputation building. The authors suggest that TNE, through which students from lesser developed countries can obtain access to HE from more developed countries, can serve as a major tool to improve the level of education and even the educational systems in those countries. Several ways in which this happens are described by the various authors. TNE's role can be as straight-forward as students leaving their Asian countries to attend universities in Europe, the US or Australia; something that has been happening in most of these countries for many years. While many students are sent by their parents, scholarships are often provided to deserving Asian students by HE institutions in both Asian and western countries. A variety of more complex arrangements have also developed over time. In some cases, dual degrees are offered in which students attend HE institutions in their home country and then travel to another country to receive additional coursework in a partner institution thereby earning a dual degree from the two universities. Foreign universities have also developed partnerships with governments and universities in Asian countries allowing them to set up programs or branches in those countries under the auspices of the local bodies.

Therefore, using the context of imperial colonialism, higher education and transnational education, the authors of each chapter provide a nation-specific conversation that delivers an account of perceptions and reality that have shaped and continue to shape the development in south-east Asia. These discussions run from macro concepts of national politics and policy to micro issues of syllabi and student assessment. They depict countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar, that due to their turbulent pasts, have struggled and are struggling to develop the infrastructure and human capital necessary to successfully provide some measure of HE for their citizens. While other chapters examine those nations that have advanced to setting their sights on becoming, such as the Philippines, or actually having become recognized as regional educational hubs focused on attracting international students as is the case in Singapore and Malaysia.

In each chapter, the authors make a strong case for how European colonialism, for most of these countries, or ties to other countries as was the case with Vietnam and Russia, hampered or helped that nation in its development and structuring of their HE and, therefore, affected that country's society as a whole. Each chapter did a good job of what was the goal of the whole book, to provide insights into the past performance of the country discussed leading to the current situation and the activities in those countries today. The book concludes with a "Summary" provided by the editors in which they restate the assumptions upon which the book is based. They talk about the rapid growth and transformation that is taking place in Asia and in the countries of the ASEAN Economic Community and how this might affect TNE in the region in light of the rise of China. Highlights from each chapter are then extracted and discussed separately for each nation. The Summary concludes with a discussion of projects such as EU SHARE, ASEAN integration and the building of EU-ASEAN university partnerships and the effect that these programs may have on TNE for the countries discussed.

However, in keeping with one aim of the book to “not be prescriptive,” the editors missed an opportunity to examine these excellent discussions *across* the ASEAN countries. A perspective of viewing TNE across nations could be used to suggest insights as to factors that could (or should) be used by ASEAN member nations. The ASEAN Economic Community, could use TNE as a tool to achieve the economic, technological, societal and prosperity goals of each member nations, the HE institutions in those nations and for the entire ASEAN region. Drawing from what was learned in Indonesia and Singapore, ASEAN politics and policy could be used to jumpstart HE programs throughout the region by benchmarking selected aspects of excellent institutions: their structures, programs, quality assurance and assessment policies and activities, and forms of governance as was done in Singapore and Malaysia.

Knowledge transfer of this type could do much to improve existing HE institutions and address quality deficiencies that exist in countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar. Governmental HE reform recommendations could be developed and disseminated throughout the Community modeled on those countries that have shown outstanding records of support by government toward HE. ASEAN countries that have enjoyed successful TNE with European and other western partners have also benefited due to a populace in which many spoke English, often an artifact of their colonization. Member nations could be encouraged to require a strong English language component in primary and secondary education as a means of preparation for TNE with foreign HE partner institutions. In short, while it was not the purpose of the book, the authors have provided much information that could be used to better prepare ASEAN countries to utilize transnational education to continue and even enhance current trends in educational improvement, economic growth and further steps toward internationalization.