**The Hybrid University in East Asia: searching for the new paradigm**

Sheng-Ju Chan, Molly N. N. Lee & Rui Yang

## A copying tradition?
According to some international rankings and benchmarking, universities in East Asia have gained prominent attention due to considerable progress made during the past two decades (Mok 2016). By examining the top 200 universities and their locations, an interesting trend is revealed: More East Asian universities are climbing up the ladder of international competition. Until the late 1980s, there were very limited signs to demonstrate that these universities could be upgraded from a 'peripheral' status to a more 'central' position. This change took place in a short period, surprising some Western and even Eastern scholars. Despite obvious improvement in higher education systems, a wide debate remains as to how East Asian universities achieve such progress. One of the prevailing explanations is that the success of East Asian higher education, particularly in Hong Kong and Singapore, simply copies the mechanisms and institutions in the West. Namely, institutional borrowing or mimicking is deemed as the cornerstone of recent improvement. Altbach (2004, 2009) even suggested that all Asian universities' roots come from the West. He further pointed out that 'no Asian country has kept, to any significant extent, its premodern academic institutional traditions. Most Asian countries had pre-Western academic institutions' (15). Therefore, 'no Asian university is truly Asian in origin – all are based on European academic models and traditions, in many cases imposed by colonial rulers' (15). This inference largely implies that current Asian universities are a copied version of Western institutions without traditional values or practices, simply losing their connection with oriental essences such as Confucianism. This assertion is somewhat supported by another seminal work, The Institutions of Education: A Comparative Study of Educational Development in the Six Core Nations, published by William Cummings in 2003. In echoing the institutional theory, this comparative study suggests the worldwide diffusion of modern education patterns to the rest of the world. According to Cummings' analysis, six types of educational models exist: Russian, French, German, American, English, and Islamic. They have been variously adopted or borrowed by different Asian countries. For example, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Singapore have been significantly impacted by English patterns while the French model has exercised considerable influence on Vietnamese higher education. Based on this logic, East Asian universities are the products or decedents of Western civilizations without the support of local soils and ideas. However, this argument is not entirely agreed upon among the academic community in higher education.

## Or unique innovation?
After reviewing the recent remarkable development of higher education systems in East Asia, Marginson (2011) concluded that the Confucian model is prevailing in this region and presents certain features not common to other systems. He singled out four major traits of the Confucian model: (1) strong nation-state shaping of structures, funding, and priorities; (2) a tendency to promote universal tertiary participation, grounded in Confucian values invested in education; (3) 'one-chance' national examinations that mediate social competition and university hierarchy; and (4) accelerated public investment in research and world-class universities. Having the same understanding, Mohrman (2008) also pointed out that an emerging global model exists for leading research universities worldwide. However, she also recognized that such a model in

China retains certain unique characteristics, particularly in institutional autonomy and academic freedom. These variations highlight the fact that universities in East Asia are not direct decedents of major Western systems. Rather, they are hybrids with various historical traditions and local social-cultural essences.

In supporting the previous argument, some political leaders in this region have insisted that 'Asian values' are fundamental in driving the progression of higher education development. Prominent politicians include Lee Kuan Yew, the late prime minister of Singapore, and Mahathir Mohamad, the former prime minister of Malaysia. The core values in Asia, codified and promoted in the Bangkok Declaration of 1993, include a preference for one-party authoritarian government or strong nation-state leadership, emphasizing social harmony, concern for the collective well-being of the community, and respect toward authority or senior figures (Chia 2011). These features are abstract notions and can be understood differently in relation to Western societies. These far reaching values exist in various social organizations and become part of the cultural beliefs in a university. Regardless of whether these Asian values really contribute to the enhancement of universities in general, these features and tendencies seem to be influential and tangible within the university organization.

In addition to these cultural values and ideas, some scholars have even argued that ancient Asian higher learning institutions brought about some impacts on modern universities in Europe. After reviewing the historical development of higher education in Continental Europe, Hayhoe and Liu (2010) boldly asserted that

> the transformation of the medieval universities of Europe into institutions that could help build up modern nation states, particularly in France, Austria, and Prussia, was profoundly influenced by a Chinese or East Asian model of higher learning, namely the civil service examination. (86)

This observation coincides with themainstreampractice of professors being civil servants in the European mode today. Furthermore, Hayhoe (2015) even argued that a 'normal university' or 'university of education' is deeply rooted in Chinese and Asian cultures and values. Cultivating the teacher as a model for children in terms of behaviors and moral principles has been the fundamental idea of the purely oriental innovative institution. This tradition has also led to the creation of similar institutions in French, American, and Japanese higher education systems in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. If such reciprocal influences did occur before, we can fairly infer that East Asian higher education is not purely borrowing from the European and American models.

**Emerging concerns**
Along with the greater advance of higher education internationalization, another great concern has emerged with respect to over-Westernization or even Americanization. In the hopes of gaining the latest scientific knowledge and technology as well as greater recognition of its international reputation, East Asia has been keen to import the notions and practices in governance, management, and even curriculum structures from the West. This development has led to the deep concern of 'academic colonialism' (Deem, Mok, and Lucas 2008) or 'institutional homogenization.' This is particularly critical for countries in East Asia who have purposely promoted world-class universities by benchmarking with well-known Western universities (Altbach 2009; Chan 2013). The greater immersion into international standards and norms has

been said to be inconsistent or even contrary to national and local traditions and values. Breit, Obijiofor, and Fitzgerald (2013) reviewed the journalism curriculum in an Australian university and found that, 'while international awareness is crucial to the study of journalism, in practice this often means an Anglo-American curriculum based aroundWestern principles of journalism education and training that are deeply rooted inWestern values and traditions' (119). This reflection highlights the potential bias or even ideology of adopting an Anglo-American stance and values in an academic subject. Based on such an analysis, East Asian universities should be very careful when they pursue international recognition and seek to borrow foreign practices andmechanisms. Given such a caveat, Breit, Obijiofor, and Fitzgerald (2013) firmly believe that it is important to focus on 'internationalization as critical de-Westernization [of the curriculum].' Such a movement points to the significance of distinguishing the differences between internationalization and 'Westernization.' This also highlights the need for the organic combination of international or external elements within existing, traditional, and local needs and concerns. Literally, there is an increasing need in critically reviewing how universities in East Asia have interacted with these external/Western values and practices.

**The hybrid notions**
If we do not take any extreme perspective from the previous discussion, we can say that East Asia is experiencing a new stage of its hybridizing process. This process not only stresses greater interaction with external or Western values, but is also deeply concerned with the traditional values, institutions, and practices. This special issue intends to critically review this dynamic and intertwined formation. Some leading scholars have also highlighted relevant developments. As Marginson (2011) suggested,

> Confucian higher education rests on a long tradition of respect for education and scholarship…[; however], the Model is not a simple adaptation of the Western university in Greater East Asia. Nor is this the splicing of Confucian tradition with Western modernization. It is an organic hybrid of old and new, and East and West: a distinctive Confucian form of modernization in the knowledge economy. (607)

Adopting a similar argument, Bhandari and Fefébure (2015) firmly believe that 'in contemporary Asia, traditions coexist with new models of higher education either importeddirectly from the west or shaped after a notion of what it means to be world class.' This co-existence gradually constitutes 'a unique Asian model of higher education that selectively borrows from the west, yet freely draws upon its own solid academic traditions' (ix). In other words, we might have witnessed the emergence of a new model of higher education system in East Asia through the hybridization process over the past decades. Asian governments and institutions have broadly experimented with alternate and authentic approaches to higher education development. In further deepening the conceptual basis, Chan (2013) proposed that researchers 'begin the project of constructing a form of an ideal type of the contemporary Asian hybrid university' (198). Among the available notions, six abstract elements broadly derived from Western and Eastern societies have been conceptualized as complex complementarities. These researchers insisted that the new Asian hybrid university should somehow meld with the spirits. These six elements, not inclusive, cover the following items:
     (1) Cartesian framing versus yin and yang,

(2) Western 'muddling through' versus Asian pragmatic approach to modernity,
(3) Western hierarchy versus more fluid organizational structures,
(4) Merit-based structures versus relational (network-friendship) structures,
(5) Freedom of expression versus politically and culturally constrained expression,
(6) Notions of democracy as a global currency versus the university as a set of linkages of restraint (199).

Examining these contrary elements, readers can understand that some of the listed values or cultures coincide with the previously discussed so-called Asian values or Confucian ideas. However, it is not our intention to verify whether these contrasting elements are valid; rather, we use them as foundations to dig into this issue in greater depth, using academic culture as an example to illustrate how universities in East Asia absorb Western patterns into domestic ones. This approach offers an informative case to explain why hybridization does not take place naturally, but is a painful and hesitant process as a result of social-cultural constraints and structure. Altbach (2010) once warned that 'the rise of Asian higher education is by no means inevitable, at least in the near future' (4). This is because 'an academic culture that is based on meritocratic values, free inquiry, and competition – combined with elements of collaboration and at least some mobility – is central to a world-class university' (4). Yet these various underpinning values and practices are not indigenous or native to current Asian higher education systems. Instead, as Yang (2015) has cautiously indicated, the most difficult part for Chinese academic culture is institutional corruption and systematic dishonesty. In fact, such negative behaviors are still major challenges for some countries in this region. These vivid descriptions with respect to the differences between Asian universities and other leading Western universities are deeply related to the contrast of 'merit-based structure' and 'relational structure' as presented by Hawkins, Neubauer, and Shin (2013).

**Papers in this special issue**
Based on the previous discussion and various arguments, this special issue aims to decipher the evolving natures and features of higher education in each country in relation to the interactive dynamics of cultures and values between local traditions and external forces, particularly Western ones. A historical-sociology analytic approach has been adopted to investigate how the current higher education systems in investigated countries have been impacted by the social, political, religious, and even colonial structures in the past. Moreover, the main focus of this special issue is to explore how these traditional values and ideas have interacted with some new or even Western paradigms or values for the past two or three decades. We are keen to know how the new hybridity is formed under the changing social-economic conditions and what the new model is that has been searched for in the East Asian scenario. This collective work includes manuscripts from six countries and societies, including China, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam, in an attempt to cover the overall picture of countries in East Asia. Moreover, these countries are at different developmental stages, facing different social-economic issues in the various colonial, political, and even religious contexts. These intertwining factors help us identify how they have shaped the hybridizing process and outcomes.

Based on such conviction, the first article was written by Collins and Bethke using Appadurai's (1996) notion of disjunctures, scapes, and flows as an analysis framework. Exploring Asia Pacific as a region, authors have examined the dynamic relationships among collective benefit, individual, and even familism inside the university. Their findings indicated

that Asian influence was portrayed as complex, local, regional, reformed under colonialism, communism, and ties to Confucianism. On the other hand, nation-state was perceived to play a conflicting role in societies by serving as a valve to letting in Western influences, Communism, and religion or philosophy. By taking a positive stance in relation to the introduction of Western norms and models into China, Yang explores how two elite universities have been struggled to model on Western experiences and operating in Confucian contexts. He asserted such bi-culturality or even multi-culturality as cultural experiment might enable top Chinese universities contributing to the inter-civilizational dialogue.

The third article deals with the Japanese East–West hybrid patterns. Yonezawa, Hoshino, and Shimauchi reflected upon the development and transformation of Japanese universities through the investigation into the interaction with other systems in this region. They found that the stress of competition and hierarchical recognition in regional higher education settings might prevent greater regional integration, leading to a situation that Japanese universities hesitate to access the traditional intellectuals, rich knowledge, talents, and networks of Asia. In the fourth article, Chan and Yang examined the Taiwanese universities about how hybridity could be formed. Two case studies indicate that in addition to adopting a Western academic structure and system, both universities retain some Confucian or East Asian values and intellectual climates. The combinations of various Western and Eastern features highlight the uniqueness of hybridity. This conclusion suggests that a conceptual model for hybrid university in Asia might be desirable.

Following the similar logic, Lee, Wan, and Sirat argued that Malaysian universities are featured by ethnized neoliberalism due to local ethnic-based politics and international ideology invasion of free market. Moreover, three types of Malaysian universities, that is, mainstream, Islamic, and Chinese community-base, are the evidences of hybrid universities, which retain distinctive policies and practices from the Western academic models. Situated in starkly different social-economic settings, Singapore has been significantly shaped by globalization for the past two decades. Yeong, Chia, and Gopinathan asserted that Asian values debate was merely a political manipulation instead of a real inspiration from Confucianism like other Asian universities have. Such contradiction constitutes a unique hybridity for Singaporean universities. Finally, Tran, Ngo, Nguyen, and Dang focus on how foreign influences upon traditionalpractices. Hybridity is accompanied with some positive changes and reforms in teaching, learning, and university governance. However, hybridity happens in largely ad hoc, fragmented, and inconsistent manners across different areas of university operations. The tensions between Western and traditional, in particular, Communist Party, principles, that are associated with the hybridization process.

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