

InFo
Vol. 9, No. 2
October 2006
pp. 97 – 104

BOOK REVIEWS

Asian Universities: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges, edited by Philip Altbach and Toru Umakoshi. Published by The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 2004 (377 pages).

Philip Altbach is Monan professor of higher education and director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College. He has published widely on comparative education and higher education both in the United States and internationally. Dr. Altbach's scholarship is highly respected in Asia and has been duly recognized in China, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, and Hong Kong.

Toru Umakoshi is a professor of higher education in the Graduate School at Obirin University in Japan and president of the Japan Comparative Education Society.

In addition, 14 other educators – Mochtar Buchori, Pit Chamnan, David Ford, Gerald Fry, Andrew Gonzalez, N. Jayaram, Motohisa Kaneko, Molly Lee, Sungho Lee, Abdul Malik, Weifang Min, Pham Lan Huong, Paitoon Sinlarat, Jason Tan – have contributed to chapters in this book. Each of them evidences a clear international perspective of higher education. Almost all have had international experience in higher education and/or have been educated internationally. Because of this, their combined understanding of Asian higher education in context is nothing short of remarkable.

Higher education in Asia is facing a number of important challenges in the 21st century. *Asian Universities* attempts to reveal the trends and bring an understanding of the associated challenges. It provides an historical perspective, yet focuses on the future. While each university and academic system in Asia is unique and has distinct historical roots, there remain a number of similarities. This book analyzes the past, present, and future in a region of the world where an unmatched "massification" of higher education is taking place, and is likely to continue in spite of the associated challenges of maintaining quality. The editors have selected 11 key nations at various stages of economic growth for

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this comparative work and in-depth analysis to reveal patterns of development in Asian higher education.

In Section 1, Altbach introduces trends and challenges in higher education in the region. In his list, he includes massification, access, differentiation, quality control, research, the academic profession, globalization, and transnationalization. His chapter is of particular value as Asian economies reach toward the next logical step in their development, which for many is that of stretching to become “knowledge-based” economies. Umakoshi follows with a chapter on the role of a growing private sector in Asian higher education. The private sector’s changing role seems to be following a similar pattern across Asian countries—which Umakoshi calls the “transition model of private sector types” (p. 39) –with certain inevitable dangers to higher education in general if such a trend were left to continue unchecked.

Section 2 considers higher education trends in the *Asian giants*, namely China and India. Recently China became the nation with the largest higher education system in the world. Weifang Min discusses the movement of Chinese higher education towards being a much greater part of the international academic community. Along with extensive economic reforms, it has made remarkable strides in terms of expansion of enrollment, structural reforms, and quality improvement since the 1980s. From the evidence presented, China appears to be on its way to fulfilling its vision of creating world-class universities. Despite all the successes gained, however, higher education retains some serious challenges, such as resolving regional disparities and maintaining a Chinese cultural identity in the midst of internationalization.

Quite dissimilarly, higher education in the other *Asian giant* is moving through a period of stunted growth. Jayaram explains that since independence (i.e., 1948), higher education in India has expanded so rapidly into a massive system that it has developed a crisis of “over-production of ‘educated’ persons” (p. 91). Additionally, education is facing a serious predicament of quality standards. Attempts at a large scale restructuring of higher education have resulted in “piecemeal tinkering” instead of a much-needed overhaul. Indian higher education has proved to be extremely resistant to change. It currently appears that market forces and the private sector just might transform higher education to some extent, but not entirely with the desired outcomes.

Sections 3, 4, and 5 deal with the countries known for *economic prosperity and academic development* (Japan, Korea, Singapore); *middle-income countries and higher education investment* (Thailand, Malaysia); and *development in the context of massification* (Indonesia, The Philippines) respectively. Trends and issues in each section are clearly elaborated on, but have not been included here for the sake of brevity of this review.

Section 6 examines higher education in the *low per capita income countries* of Vietnam and Cambodia. Huong and Fry uncover the historical and political context of Vietnam, emphasizing its strong tradition of values and pointing out how integral higher education has been to the nation in the past. Since the introduction of *doi moi* (economic renovation), higher education has undergone rapid expansion despite budgetary constraints. Vietnam sees education a foremost priority as it moves to a transition economy.

Higher education in Cambodia, on the other hand, as assessed by Chamnan and Ford, is in turmoil due to the recent destruction of Cambodia's intellectual heritage. As a result, it now has an extremely low starting point for development, together with the challenges of underfunding, inequitable access to higher education, and irrelevant curricula. Cambodia is also experiencing severe conflict between a culture valuing tradition and an education system promising modernity and change. The desire is there to develop higher education, but Cambodia faces numerous hurdles and lacks the structure for it to mature soon.

I believe Altbach and Umakoshi have successfully achieved their aim in publishing *Asian Universities*, which in their words was "to highlight the realities of contemporary higher education in the Asian context" (p. 10). Altbach, though a westerner, is well qualified to be primary editor of such a work since he has a very definite global perspective on higher education. He is able to stand back, as he reflects on the trends and challenges facing Asian higher education.

The book is scholarly, insightful, and thought provoking, yet remarkably fascinating. The authors have squeezed an immense amount of detail into a very readable, engaging document. The contents lead one to a greater understanding of an array of contributing factors and their linkages to the development of higher education as it exists today in each of these countries. This work tells it as it is, exposing some of the potentially embarrassing aspects of the past and present. Its arguments are well supported, leading one almost naturally to recognize the challenges that will be faced as each country pursues its goals for higher education. Themes emerge that point to the aspirations of Asian countries to have higher education usher them to economic development. However, the most critical challenge seems to be the somewhat conflicting demands for social and economic development: providing equitable access to higher education, yet enhancing its quality.

It is hard to fault this book. Its approach, as it focuses on the future, is quite correctly non-prescriptive since each educational system differs so vastly and comprises its own unique complexity. Thus, it merely reveals hurdles and dangers. It would be interesting to compare higher education systems in these countries 20 years from now to see how each has developed.

I see the primary audience as being leaders in Asia who accept the responsibility of forging the course for institutions of higher learning or for creating a support system for education. The book has tremendous value in helping policy makers and educational leaders appreciate the challenges while perceiving the larger context. For them, I consider it a *must-read*. Comprehending these challenges from a wider perspective is vital as they face contemporary issues, set directions for the future, and effect policies to lead Asian higher education forward. This work fills an important need, bringing together a wealth of information for understanding present realities and future challenges, no matter at what stage of development a higher education system may find itself.

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Public Health: Power, Empowerment and Professional Practice, by Glenn Laverack. Published by Palgrave Macmillan, New York, NY, 2005 (127 pages).

Glenn Laverack is Director of Health Promotion in the Department of Social and Community Health of the University of Auckland, New Zealand. He has worked for more than twenty years in the area of public health in the United Kingdom, Asia, Africa, and the Pacific. This book builds on his earlier work, *Health Promotion Practice: Power and Empowerment* (2004). In writing the book, Laverack aimed to “provide the reader with an understanding of the concepts of power and empowerment, . . . introduce practical approaches for helping individuals, groups and communities to gain power, and . . . provide a means to measure and visually represent empowerment” (p. xiii).

While empowerment is a term commonly used in the social sciences, its applications to the real world of public service organizations oftentimes fall short of its real meaning. Public health practitioners are not exempt. Although simultaneously utilizing an “emancipatory ideology and discourse” (p. 2), most public health practitioners still wield control over their clients through programs with a “top-down” approach. This incongruity, the author contends, could be due to a shallow understanding of the meaning of power and empowerment, an unclear idea of factors influencing the process of empowerment, or the lack of know-how in making this idea of empowerment operational within public health practice. Further, bureaucratic settings institutionalize public health professionals as experts, thus, their services and expert advice are normally expected to regulate and manage individuals.

Laverack takes the reader to the centrality of the concept of power in public health practice by first defining power and then describing variations in the exercise of power, powerlessness, and the cultural/ contextual interpretations of power. He then explains how public health practitioners can help individuals to gain power by providing three strategies: effective communication, “increasing critical self-awareness” of individuals, and nurturing an “empowering professional-client relationship” (p. 40). Next, he moves on to discuss how practitioners can help groups and communities to gain power by introducing a framework that integrates the empowerment domains and the empowerment continuum model. Laverack also discussed means by which the public health professional can help people who are “denied access to, or positions of power . . . within a society” (p. 75). These marginalized groups need assistance in ways that will help them gain power. He also devotes a chapter to discussing the importance of developing a working definition of power and ways of measuring empowerment in a graphical way. The ‘spider-web’ configuration introduced by the author as a method of measuring empowerment is field-tested and is easily understood by stakeholders when assessing the successes and failures of

building empowerment in a community. In the last chapter, Laverack summarizes his main points and conclusions.

Laverack reminds his readers of one concern: an individual or a group of people may refuse to or may not be able to be empowered. This could stem from a variety of reasons—individuals who have lived in oppressive/powerless conditions may not feel they have the right to empower themselves; some may evade the responsibility of making decisions so as to not regret having made a wrong decision later on; others may think ‘experts’ should do the deciding for them and so delegate that responsibility to them; or, the individual may be a minor or mentally ill. Laverack says, “power cannot be given to people but must be gained or seized by themselves” (p. 3). When dealing with those who cannot be empowered due to mental illness or for being a minor, he suggests that the practitioner pursue other means, such as policy and legislation. This view is congruent with the biblical principle that human beings have the power to choose and that the ability to exercise one’s power of choice is essential to one’s humanity. Practitioners, therefore, should encourage and not in any way inhibit others to exercise this power when able.

This book is highly recommended for public health professionals who wish to learn how to facilitate the empowerment of individuals, groups, and communities they work with. It not only provides a sound theoretical basis for the concept of power and empowerment but also presents practical ideas and means by which these concepts can be applied. The book contains several real life illustrations to help the reader better understand the concepts presented. It aptly integrates principles of communication in building power relationships that could improve public health practice. It also expounds on a visual method of measuring empowerment, which serves as a means of evaluating whether the intended empowerment of individuals and the community at large has been achieved.

I found this book to be easy to read and very instructional. Not many books have been written about empowerment using the practical approach that Laverack did. Adding to that the specific focus on public health needs and concerns, and this book has potential for making a real difference in the context of public health practice. Public health professionals would do well to read this book in order to strengthen their practice, especially in the area of helping individuals and communities gain power to make changes and adopt more healthy choices in their lives.

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International Forum

The Engaging Leader: Winning with Today's Free Agent Workforce. Ed Gubman, Ph.D. Chicago, IL: Kaplan Business, 2003 (224 pages).

The changing mindset of today's workforce includes an increase in the number of workers who are on the search for better employers, and diminishing company loyalty due to current trends of layoffs and turnovers. This has created a need for a new approach in management. Ed Gubman, a human resources expert, has looked into this issue of employee free agency in his book *The Engaging Leader: Winning with Today's Free Agent Workforce*, and he discusses it in relation to the professional sports world. While watching sports and looking at it from a management consultant and business psychologist's perspective, the author realized that sports leaders deal with similar problems to business leaders. They both deal with developing team chemistry, finding the right mix of talents and motivating them to achieve set goals,, especially with the current trend of workforce free agency.

Why do some teams keep on winning? What makes for a winning team? What makes a successful business organization? Leadership plays a key role in the success of an organization. Business leaders have used techniques from management gurus to answer these questions, but with today's changing business environment, these "old school" techniques have become less effective. Ed Gubman shares good examples from sports on what it takes to be a winning team and that "winning is about how leaders engage the talent on their teams to perform maximum capabilities" (p. 3).

According to Gubman, a leader who engages his employees enables them to have a "strong psychological, social, and intellectual connections to their work, your organization, and its goals"(p. 3). Through engaging leadership, one is able to cater to the "unique needs of individuals," especially to the talented ones that contribute much to (your) organization (p. 4). It is important that leaders are aware of what the employees want, particularly in the differences between generations. We can safely say that "a majority of them are looking for four things from work: freedom, control, accountability, and caring" (p. 35).

In the book, Tex Winter, a legendary basketball coach, described two leadership styles. He noted that "there are two kinds of coaches—drivers and builders" (p.5). This is similar to what Douglas McGregor described with his Theory X and Theory Y type of managers. A leader aware of this style who is versatile and can adapt to the changing situation and environment is more successful than one who sticks to what they are used to. This is clearly illustrated in sports through a comparison of Phil Jackson, who won 6 basketball championships with Chicago, and Pat Riley, who won some championships but was not able to sustain the winning streak.

Three areas are suggested for engaging leaders in considering how to build successful teams: talent, goals, and chemistry. The first area has to do with “how you select, develop, and keep talent” (p.45). Talent isn’t always innate—sometimes it needs to be nurtured and practiced. Goals need to be defined, highly achievable and at the same time simple, so everyone in the organization can be excited about them, enabling all to put more effort into it. Chemistry is “building an environment with trust and structure so people can work together effectively and with excellence” (p.45).

The “Huddle Section” at the end of each chapter is a good way of helping readers relate to the topics and become engaging leaders themselves. In addition to this, *The Engaging Leader Index* by Gubman Consulting is also found in the book, giving the readers a way to calculate and know how engaging he or she is as a leader.

Sport analogies are found in most parts of the book, together with some good insights from the author on what can be done in real life and in real businesses. Illustrating issues relating to engaging people, team building and chemistry, and establishing goals in business through sports makes this book a lot more attractive and eye-opening, especially to sports-minded businessmen. These leaders might now find more worth from the time they spend watching the ESPN channel, where they can see how coaches and sports leaders succeed through the right engagement of their players. One downside of this book is that there are people who are not into sports, and they might have some difficulty relating to the analogies and might find this book uninteresting or difficult to understand.

The book’s simplicity and the use of sports analogies make it entertaining and a relief from the usual norm of academic books. This is a must read for everyone who has a passion for leadership and who wishes to improve on the changing workforce environment, especially for those who love sports. This gives us a new perspective and purpose in reading the sports pages, not just as sports fans, but also as business leaders searching to understand human nature. This sort of cross-profession pollination can help leaders find everyday ways of solving complex leadership issues in ways they might not otherwise have thought of.

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