

Roadmapping Asia Pacific Universities

Skill-sets young minds in the 21st century need so that they can serve humanity

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~ With globalization in mind, in the 21st century, in which western culture is virtually and palpably embedded in the Asia Pacific society, it seems to me, it's imperative that Asia Pacific universities should and must find a way to harmonize these two seemingly different cultures, eastern and western.... Asia Pacific universities could develop a new and novel roadmap for all our young minds in the 21st century so that they could serve humanity appropriately.

President C. L. Liu, Chairman of this panel, President Jeffrey Tsai of Asia University, our most hospitable host, Professor Raymond Yeh, who was the Chairman of University of Texas at Austin's Computer Science Department, when I was a physics post-doc in that university. Provost Benjamin Wah, of Chinese University of Hong Kong, Professor C.V. Ramamoorthy of University of California, Berkeley and, last but not least, our keynote speaker, Joel Brinkley, and fellow students from Asia University (in Taiwan, since there are two others in Japan and South Korea.)

Good afternoon! This is such a great honor for me to be on the same stage with such an august group of individuals and with the students of Asia University. I must congratulate the administrators, faculty and students of this fast growing and fledgling university, Asia University, for organizing this Forum. This event is a clear manifestation of the breadth and depth of this young but aspiring university, which is propelled by great leadership.

I am also excited to be in the presence of such a distinguished individual Joel Brinkley, a Pulitzer Prize laureate. When I was growing up as a physicist, it took me quite awhile into my career to realize that Nobel laureates, such as Richard Feynman, looked like a human being and not a "diagram."

I am equally pleased today to see that a Pulitzer Prize laureate also looks like a human being! But of course, he inherited great journalistic genes, being the son of the great

David Brinkley, which many of us in the United States in the 60's and 70's learned to watch every night on TV! As the son of a journalist, I was naturally fascinated by Joel Brinkley's discussion about the responsibility and role of how a journalist should report a "story."

From his talk, I learned one thing which he repeated several times, and that was what he referred to as the "*unintended consequences* ." Furthermore, the many case studies mentioned in his speech also had another important concept embedded in it, and that is **history** is, or should be, our best teacher. Many of you may have heard the famous quotation from an American writer called Pearl S. Buck who said that "*If you want to understand today, you have to search yesterday.*"

Also, as a senior administrator of a university in Taiwan, I am very much touched by Professor Raymond Yeh's palpable interest and wisdom about what skill-sets a university student in Asia Pacific should have in the 21st century in order for him/ her to be a meaningful contributor to society, nation and the world at-large.

I am so inspired by these two talks that I hope you do not mind that I will try to amalgamate as best I can these two themes of Brinkley and Yeh. The best way I know how is to bring out a "case study."

The case study I would like to center on belongs to today's hot social topic for higher education in Taiwan in particular, Asia Pacific in general.

The topic of today's Forum is to discuss **Cultivating Globally Competent Human Resources**. I am sure you would agree with me that the cultivation of such human resources must originate with the best higher education system, which must be, at least in part if not in total, how we structure our higher education. To this end, I like to focus on a closely connected issue, and that is the issue of "global ranking of university."

I have chosen this topic because I just returned from a meeting for "Asia Top University executives" in Tokyo where this topic was

discussed extensively. The meeting was organized by the largest scientific publication company in the world, Elsevier.

At the meeting, there was a talk by Professor Alan Johnson. The title of his talk is "Challenges of Research Management: An Australian Perspective." Professor Johnson was the former Deputy Vice Chancellor (which is equivalent to Vice President in most non-British-like universities) of the University of Adelaide.

The primary message I took away from Professor Johnson's talk is "how to improve the ranking of your university." The ranking which Professor Johnson focused on is the so-called Shanghai Jiao-Tong University Academic Ranking of World Universities (AWRU <http://www.arwu.org/>), although for today's discussion how such a ranking was carried out is less of relevance.

I should mention that there are so many rankings out there now in the public domain. Often, and especially for Asian universities, they provide very different and often conflicting results. I would be surprised if the average citizen on the street is not utterly confused by them. No doubt, such a discussion has a great deal of resonance in Asia Pacific for the following reasons.

Undoubtedly, in the past several decades, Asia Pacific universities have received, and will continue to receive in the foreseeable future, significant funding from their respective governments. This is *due in part* to Asia Pacific governments' recognition of the profound value of higher education as an engine to move citizens up the ladder, economically and/or intellectually. Such movement can and will transform society and nations, for the better, I might add.

Also, *in part* because they have the financial might to do so! For example, in Taiwan, there is the so called "five years fifty billion (New Taiwan Dollars)" which is approximately \$1.7 billion US) additional funding beyond the normal funding for twelve top universities.

Likewise, in Mainland China, there are two massive projects known as 985 and 211 to infuse funding to improve the qualities of Chinese top universities.

Since the highly visible government (extra) funding de facto comes from the taxpayer's contribution, it is a natural consequence that there will be intense and palpable social anxiety to demonstrate "return of investment" or ROI. However, unlike a corporation, where ROI can easily be measured by the intake of profit on an annual quarterly basis, ROI for a university is almost by definition amorphous and not easily quantifiable, for sure not within the time scale of one year.

With this as background, and even with the ubiquitously understood ancient Chinese proverb "*It takes ten years to grow trees, but a hundred to rear people,*" it is no wonder that with explosive economic growth in the region naturally propels society's impatience about having tangible results in a short time scale, "global ranking of universities" which gives an annual "number" representing "quality" became a "quantifiable" ROI index for universities for the society to hold on to.

An "unintended consequence," as Joel would say, of such rankings are receiving intense media interest and are reported with profuse frequency all across Asia Pacific. Without a doubt, we the administration of universities must be proactively driving the issues of ranking, or more broadly the issue of quality of education, and not be led by outside forces.

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To be proactive, universities must not give the perception (*and we know that perception*

is reality) that because of ranking pressure, we are deviating from the fundamental mission of a university, which is to educate generations after generations young minds with knowledge and the responsibility to improve quality of life for humanity. After all, the ultimate reason for research is for human to have a deeper understanding of its surroundings, whether that be physical or humanistic, from which better understanding of human relations with one another and with the environment can emerge and innovations can be natural outcome.

There is another issue I like to bring up today which although I am not sure what is the "unintended consequence." However, from history, I am confident that it must be profound!

The history I learned is by noting that Charles Eliot, Harvard University's president in the late 19th and early part of the 20th century said

"... a university, in any worthy sense of the term, must grow from seed. It cannot be transplanted from England or Germany in full leaf and bearing. ... When the American university appears, it will not be a copy of foreign institutions, or a hot-bed plant, but the slow and natural outgrowth of American social and political habits... The American college is an institution without a parallel; the American university will be equally original."

I rest my case with the fact that in today's world, no one would view Harvard University as a "copy" of Cambridge University in Great Britain or University of Gottingen in Germany.

(I am treading on dangerous ground here by heralding Harvard University when it is so obvious that in today's Panel, it is de facto or nearly, a University of Illinois Champagne/Urbana and UC Berkeley "mafia"!)

Purely by serendipity, all the universities represented at this meeting in Tokyo last week, from Japan, South Korea, Mainland China and

Taiwan, have a common underpinning, and that is they all stand on the same foundation of Confucianism. For example, one cannot but help to take note that the oldest university in our group, Sungkyunkwan University, was founded in 1398 to offer prayers and memorials to Confucius and his disciples, and to promote the study of the Confucian canon.

I think there is no doubt that Confucianism for Asia Pacific would surely be a component, certainly an important component, of Asia's *social and political habits*, as I so boldly paraphrase Charles Eliot.

With globalization in mind in the 21st century, in which western culture is virtually and palpably embedded in the Asia Pacific society, it seems to me is imperative that Asia Pacific universities should and must find a way to harmonize these two seemingly different cultures, eastern and western. Perhaps by amalgamating these two vastly different cultures, one could create a new intellectual ambience; Asia Pacific universities could develop a new and novel roadmap for all our young minds in the 21st century so that they could serve humanity appropriately.

I would say that if universities in our region could do this, then we have taken an important step towards the goal of this Forum!

Thank you so much for your attention.

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