



# Enhancing Global Competitiveness: University Ranking Movement in Asia

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The Academic Rankings and Advancement of Higher Education:  
Lessons from Asia and other Regions

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# Outline of the presentation

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# Introduction

- A development of increased competition among the nation states in light of seeking a better position within this new political and economic order.
- This study aims to critically analyze how specific countries in Asia, including Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia, strategically use university rankings to restructure higher education systems and improve competitiveness at the global stage.
- Special focus is directed to aspects such as the world-class university plan, global war for talent, governance reforms and finances in order to examine the relationship between the rankings and enhanced competitiveness.



# Intensification of Global Competition



## Rise of neo-liberalism

- The driver of the mounting global competition has primarily related to the ideology of neo-liberalism since the 1980s.
- The expansion of market competition into higher education in order to serve public needs and interests.
- The accelerated momentum of neo-liberalism has also gained substantial inspiration from the endorsement of major supranational organizations, such as the OECD, World Bank and WTO (Bassett & Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009).



# International assessment of competitiveness

- The World Economic Forum (WEF) publishes its *Global Competitiveness Report* annually
- The Institute of Management Development (IMD) releases its *World Competitiveness Yearbook* every year
- Leading to the continuous acceleration of global competition



**Global competitiveness:  
The prominent role of university**

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# Elements of competitiveness

- WEF defines competitiveness as: the set of institutions, policies, and factors that determine the level of productivity of a country. (WEF, 2011:4)
- Competitiveness seems to be constrained less by natural resources and geographical location and becomes more about capital accumulation, the formation of skills and technology transfer, and making the most strategic and efficient use of the global division of labor (Green et al., 2007).



# The prominent role of university

- WEF's *Global Competitiveness Report*
- “higher education and training” is an essential factor and classified as an “efficiency enhancer,” indicating that the quality of higher education does matter (WEF, 2011)
- With the rise of a knowledge economy, three major university functions—teaching, research, and social services—are directly in relation to global competitiveness (Marginson, 2010).



# The University Ranking Movement in Asia



# The effects of global rankings

- A strong inspiration to convince the general public that local universities must be reformed (Hazelkorn, 2011)
- A “scientific” and “solid” foundation for measuring the global standing of territorial universities.
- A “reputation arms race” representing a movement towards “international standards or benchmarking” as an objective way to measure the competitiveness of each university in particular and every country in general.



# Asian responses to rankings

- A strong “catch-up mentality” exists among Asian countries in response to Western influences (Yang, 2011)
- Many Asian officials pay special attention to the results of world academic rankings (Taiwan & Malaysia)
- The strong attitude of competing with leading countries in the west and neighboring countries in Asia make this race more competitive and “imperative” in nature.



# Interaction effect

- A corresponding reaction known as the “ripple effect.” (Japan & Taiwan)
- Through these interaction effects and copied policies, university rankings have produced “a collective anxiety” for Asia countries in fear of being left behind in the global competition.
- Sector-wide reforms in higher education are initiated in order to maintain comparative advantages over neighboring countries.



# Policies and Strategies in Response to the University Ranking Movement

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# World-class university

- Japan: *COE21* in 2002 & *Global 30 Scheme* in 2008
- Taiwan: *Aim for the Top University Plan*
- Malaysia: *Accelerated Programme for Excellence (APEX)*
- Singapore: *Global Schoolhouse Plan*
  
- Selective universities in each country (excluding Singapore) are chosen to improve their research output and degree of internationalization with extra funding



# Global war for talent

- Raising competitiveness concerns the accumulation of human capital, attracting bright faculty and students has become a critical issue to be addressed (Ng, 2011)
- Four types of talent: foreign students, foreign scholars, overseas nationals, and domestic faculty
- Attracting foreign students and top scholars across the global (Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan & Japan)
- Malaysia: “Brain Gain Malaysia” and the “Returning Expert” program (Welch, 2011)
- Taiwan: Attracting Overseas Senior Talent Program” (伯樂計畫) in 2005



# Governance reforms: corporatization

- Appropriate governance and institutional autonomy are common infrastructures (Salmi, 2009)
- Corporatization has been regarded as an effective strategy to raise institutional competitiveness
- Japan: Corporatizing national universities to enhance institutional autonomy and excellence in 2004 (Oba, 2010)
- Singapore: NUS and NTU were required to transform from statutory boards to university companies in 2005 (Lo, 2010).
- Taiwan: Unsuccessful reform in corporatization in 2002
- Malaysia: devolving more decision-making power to Universiti Sains Malaysia, the only university selected by APEX



# Finances

- Require abundant resources and expensive facilities to have better performance in the global rankings (Altbach & Balán, 2007)
- Limited public funding for all HEIs (excluding Singapore)
- Concentrating resources on a small group of universities
- Uneven distribution simply reflects the need to pursue better rankings and in turn global competitiveness (WCU Plans)
- Diverse incomes from different sources
- Performance-based funding introduced into these Asian countries (Herbst, 2009)
- Domestic comparisons are prevailing



**Enhancing Global Competitiveness:  
A Divided Future for Domestic  
Higher Education Systems?**



# The success of Asian countries

- Enhancing global competitiveness is the major discourse of national development in these four Asian countries while the university ranking movement created the “collective anxiety” that pushed this to the extreme.
- Key elements for raising competitiveness: the set of institutions, policies, and factors
- Phil Baty (The ranking editor at Times Higher Education): “there is the start of a power shift from the West to the East” (University World News, 2012)



# Challenges for educational governance

- A more divided, segmented, and hierarchical higher education system domestically
- Selective concentration of public funding
- “second” tier or teaching-intensive universities (other domestic universities)
- Traditional, public and urban universities are favored
- Distortion of balanced development of academic fields (big science vs. soft science)
- Research outweighs teaching activities
- Greater differential treatment for various groups and stakeholders
- The sacrifice of the rest of the sector in Taiwan, Jpan and Malaysia?



# Conclusion

- Universities increasingly play a key role in determining nation states' comparative advantage in international setting.
- The ripple effect created in Asia region began to provoke a “collective anxiety” over being left behind at these global university rankings.
- Some common policies and strategies have been launched including a world-class university plan, global war for talent, governance reforms, and finances.
- Solution to the divided domestic system: a “world-class system” instead of world-class university



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