

Higher learning and the pursuit of a democratic regionalism

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ABSTRACT

The growth and spread of the networked university in countries across the Asia Pacific coincides with developments at the global level that are driving a new form of regionalism. This is based much less on the cultural, historic and political factors relevant in the past, and more on the economic, environmental and social imperatives of increasing importance to the future. This paper draws heavily upon doctoral research into the civil purpose of the academy, and the key role of higher learning in the formation and articulation of the state. It is argued that the new regionalism represents the latest expression of state formation; however, the precise shape and democratic tenor of this new civil form will hinge upon the way in which higher learning is organised and conducted in the present.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of semester, in mid 2004, an extraordinary series of events began to unfold between Australia and China that fully revealed the underside of the massive trade in higher education that exists between the two countries. Those events began with the murder of a young Chinese student, known as 'Steffi', at the hands of her boyfriend, twenty-three year old Zhang Long. But before fleeing the country Zhang had performed a very cunning ruse, in order to avoid detection. To begin with, he returned on more than one occasion to the murder scene, at their apartment in Minamurra Flats in suburban Canberra, and, having rolled Steffi's corpse in rugs, continued to heavily douse it with insecticide and perfume. At the same time, he began communicating with Steffi's parents and cousins, back in China, and so managed to keep up Steffi's 'virtual' presence. For weeks, and even months, Steffi's family continued to be under the impression that she was still attending tutorials and lectures at the University of Canberra.

In fact, it took nearly eight months before the stench finally overwhelmed neighbours and they contacted police, by which time Zhang was back in his home province, in China. Police used DNA sampling to identify the body and then there began a long international ordeal. The killer was tracked down and he confessed, but the Australian authorities refused to cooperate in the conviction unless they were given an assurance that the death penalty would not apply. The victim's parents, however, were calling for justice, and there were allegations that Zhang's lawyers were seeking to settle out of court. The inquiries and diplomatic wrangling continued over years, complicated by the lack of an extradition treaty between the two countries. Early in the piece, investigators had dismissed conspiracy. Although cunning,

Zhang was definitely not a spy. Steffi was not part of Falun Gong. All the forensic results showed that this was a domestic brawl gone horribly wrong.¹

The real mystery was: why had Steffi's disappearance not been noticed earlier? The answer is complicated, but also revealing. When the new semester had begun, and lectures resumed, a new nation-wide centralised computer system was in the process of being bedded down. One of the many tasks of the new Higher Education Information Management System was to automatically notify Commonwealth immigration officials when a foreign student failed to enrol, or re-enrol, thereby alerting them to any potential violation of a student visa. But there was a system glitch and Steffi's absence went unrecorded and her failure to appear went unnoticed. The University was reprimanded, and told to monitor classes for a semester, but was otherwise praised by the department for its 'excellent compliance system' (UC 2005). Initially, the University was contrite about the incident, especially given the long-running controversy over universities being used as a 'back door' route for immigration to Australia. After the fault was tracked down to computer error, the University's international office made it clear that any suggestion – in the media or otherwise – that the University was not taking care of its international students, could prompt legal action (UC 2005). Clearly, the University had its reputation to protect.

When the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) reported its audit on the University of Canberra in the middle of 2003, exactly one year before the murder, the University was commended for its care and support for all of its students, both local and international, and was encouraged to pursue its 'tactical plan' to increase international enrolments – already 900 onshore and 500 offshore – by 100 percent over the coming years. Complaints and concerns raised by international students that reached the audit panel, including the lack of responsiveness at the international service desk, were mentioned in the report, but did not substantially influence the findings. The audit panel merely spoke of 'ensuring adequate resources' were available to meet projections in demand (AUQA 2003, 7-9). At one level, this episode points to a problem discussed in the literature, about the way in which quality audits are framed and conducted in Australia; to primarily reassure overseas customers, and therefore serve the demands of marketing (Vidovich 2002, 405), rather than genuinely seeking to protect students' interests.

This hypothesis is supported by the continual appearance of reports of the isolation, loneliness and increasing despair experienced by foreign students (Deumert et al 2005; Sawir et al 2008). Moreover, the incongruence between what audits suggest and the daily experience of foreign students may be explained, to some extent, by the 'rituals of verification' thesis, whereby the audit process becomes much more important than the actuality (Power 1997). That is, a false sense of reality can be created by the culture of

¹ This account is compiled from official sources (AFP, 2005; Stanhope 2006) and news summaries (Sina.com.cn 2005, online; Armitage 2005, online). The ACT Attorney General's Office (Corbell 2008) confirmed in early 2008 that China would not be seeking the death penalty in the event of a successful conviction against Zhang Long.

performance and this is facilitated by the massive growth in the 'grey science' of numbers, and the use of 'controlling technologies' to insist on regulatory compliance (Rose 1999, 43-60). Of course, this phenomenon is not confined to higher education. However, there is an irony in the fact that the bureaucratisation of social science, combined with the shift towards knowledge becoming an internationally traded commodity, are together having a crippling impact on the university: chewing away at its moral core, enfeebling it as an ethical community and undermining what is ultimately its social purpose as an institution.

The argument presented here, which is drawn from a much larger doctoral project, is that the university is foremost a civil institution, in that its most important activities and products are distinguished by the way in which higher learning shapes citizenship and underpins the practice and processes of democracy. Furthermore, along with the legislature and the courts, the university possesses certain higher order functions: in the course of scientific research, scholarship and professional training it generates technology, in the broad sense of creating physical and social mechanisms, and these can be seen in the same context as 'legislative codes' in that they have the power to govern and order daily life (Feenberg 1995, 5). When these higher order functions of the university are neglected, or controlled externally due to the absence of substantial autonomy, it will fail to perform its most essential and critical task. In the language of the market, it will fail to pursue its core business, that which gives it a competitive advantage. By the same token, many aspects of the university – as with the courts and the legislature – do not properly belong in the market place, as they are clearly more a function of the state. The university, therefore, sits in a very awkward position in relation to the state, at least within democracies. Its services are vital to the proper functioning of the state, but to achieve this the institution must remain independent of the political process.

In the context of emerging regionalism, what this suggests is that notions of a global civil society are most likely to find concrete expression in respect to regional co-operation, interaction and organisation. That is, the most critical function of higher learning within the Asia Pacific community will be the way in which it helps to build the foundations for a democratic form of regionalism. This will not occur merely in an abstract theoretical sense, but as a result of the practical realities of the need for co-operation, in order to meet the mutual challenges that are being confronted. Economically and socially the Asia Pacific region is the world's most dynamic and diverse region. It is also undergoing massive change, with the shift towards the creation of knowledge societies, as many countries focus heavily on their innovation policies, technological capabilities and scientific outputs (Krishna & Turpin 2007, 4-8). At the same time, the whole region is proving to be a large laboratory for 'demand-driven, trade-oriented mobility of people, programmes and institutions in education' (Marginson & McBurnie 2004, 196). In short, the region as a whole is a testing ground in which the formative elements - the organisational forms and behavioural modes - that will shape civil life into the future are being processed within a confluence of cultural, political and technological change. Higher learning has always played a central role in

shaping human urban existence, in state formation, and in ordering civil society, both instrumentally and symbolically. These same processes are at work today, on a massive scale, with the growth and spread of universities across the Asia Pacific. These are the machinery rooms where the organisational templates that will govern and 'legislate' the order of daily life in the 'Pacific Century' are currently being cut and forged.

The clearest manifestation of this phenomenon can be found in the fact that universities are invariably located at the generative core, and deeply embedded within, the nodes and clusters of the emerging network economy. The reason for this is that they tend to have well developed communications and mature international linkages. The proposition here is that the texture, tone and content of student and research exchange networks will be formative in the emergence of civil society at the regional level. However, when this proposition is matched against the way in which higher learning is currently being organised across the Asia Pacific there is a sharp disjuncture between the ideal, of building a robust international community, and what is often the brutal reality (as portrayed earlier). There is no more an urgent need for collaboration, shared intellectual problem solving, and tolerance than in the Asia Pacific, given the vast disparities in wealth and opportunity, and the massive cultural, environmental, political and social differences and challenges to be confronted. Yet, nowhere is there so much fragmentation and a lack of coherence in approach. At one level the massive expansion of higher education across the region has been made possible by market forces being unleashed, but this can has also come at the costs of eroding the basic assets on which these markets exist in the first place. This point will be exemplified by examining Australia's role in the expansion of higher education exports (HEE) in the region. Australia is a large centre for student exchange and was one of the earliest pioneers in the creation of the 'for profit' system. As can be shown, however, in hindsight its approach was ambitious but in some respects fundamentally flawed and counter-productive.

Australia and the region's higher education market

Australia has been involved in international educational exchange from 1904 when the first students began arriving from overseas, mainly from Asia. This expanded in the post-war era after the multinational Colombo Plan for Cooperative Development in South and South-East Asia was launched in 1951, and by the mid 1960s the number of overseas students attending Australian universities was around 5000, comprising almost ten percent of enrolments, a level that remained fairly stable for the next two decades. This changed radically after the election of the Labor Government. From the mid to late 1980s, Australia was fully embracing a market-based system aimed at the full-recovery of costs, and was also soon championing the cause of regional integration, reflected in its push for the creation of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. At the same time, its universities began competing aggressively in the Asian market, and the financial rewards from this have helped to reshape the higher education landscape in Australia. Today, twenty years later, it is possible to examine and assess some of the

implications of this direction in policy, a direction that has since become a global norm.

A useful framework for analysing the impact of Australia's HEE is the extent to which they can be seen to represent the 'globalisation' or 'internationalisation' of Australia's higher education. Internationalisation is indicated by the presence of mutuality and reciprocal cultural relations. Globalisation, on the other hand, is marked by a predominance of academic capitalism: the commercialisation of programs and activities, and the commodification and marketisation of education services (Welch 2002, 439). By the time the Australian HEE market was well established by the mid 1990s, the OECD reported that there were 1000 international initiatives, including interdisciplinary approaches with an area or regional base, explicitly comparative curricula, subjects with an international focus, and curricula broadened by an international component in institutions across Australia. However, most examples came from areas of strong demand in business, economics and commerce rather than the arts, the humanities and social sciences. Moreover, Australian international programs were criticised for being motivated more by financial concerns than by a commitment to internationalising either institutional profiles or the curriculum (Welch 2002, 453-5). However, this is a general phenomenon, affecting not only Australia, and may result from market reforms which often prompt institutions to launch aggressive marketing while not paying close enough attention to student needs. This might be considered a symptom of the move towards a new buyer beware environment in which students are being forced to adapt to the idea of being 'consumers' (Baldwin & James 2000). In this regard, this might be considered, at least in part, as a transitional or adjustment problem.

Table 1: Comparison of selected award course completions by citizenship

<i>Broad Field of Education</i>	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
<i>Domestic Students</i>										
Natural & Physical Sciences	9,175	9,855	10,039	10,268	10,403	12,930	12,558	12,746	13,359	13,771
Management & Commerce	23,380	26,000	27,804	29,374	30,182	33,036	34,291	35,525	36,416	36,544
Society & Culture ¹	27,221	29,496	30,420	31,253	31,527	33,705	34,432	36,431	38,810	38,844
<i>Overseas Students</i>										
Natural & Physical Sciences	1,219	1,366	1,601	1,791	2,196	1,202	1,412	1,690	2,320	2,768
Management & Commerce	7,698	9,945	12,121	13,639	17,277	20,041	23,229	27,565	30,629	33,590
Society & Culture ¹	2,093	2,388	2,828	3,189	4,008	2,903	3,499	4,693	5,333	5,673

Note: Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) is incorporated into Society and Culture.

Source: DEST 2007

Deeper structural changes are evident in the way educational profiles are being altered due to high demand in certain areas of the international market. This has led to heavy concentrations in vocational areas, particularly in management and commerce, and in information technology, while the natural sciences, along with the social sciences and humanities (HSS), are under represented. Only eight percent of international students enrol in the HSS, compared to around 48 percent in commerce and management (see Table 1, below). This raises the concern of long-term imbalances in capacity building as it affects the ability of disciplines to compete for funds against rival disciplines. These trends contribute to decisions by some universities to cut back and restructure their humanities courses. In at least one instance, it has led to moves to abolish the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Social Science degrees altogether (Lane 2007, 23). The converse is likely to occur in client countries as students seek out particular areas of tuition, creating gaps in capacity.

The pattern of enrolments of overseas students indicates that demand arises from a comparatively small elite with an ability to pay more for higher education than it would pay at home. However, by purchasing courses overseas, this student population reduces the ability for the client countries to build capacity in particular areas, such as business studies, and, as such, represents a 'flight of capital' (Turpin, Iredale & Crinnion 2002, 338-40). Problems related to capacity building and disciplinary imbalances can be made worse by the fact that as more foreign students are trained in Australia, more also tend to stay and find work, contributing to the net 'brain drain' from client countries (Marginson & McBurnie 2004, 148), the ultimate impact being the great potential to make worse the wealth divide between nations (Turpin 2004, 9) given that the negative impacts are most keenly felt upon the smaller, poorer countries (Commander 2003; Beine, Docquier & Rapoport 2008). These types of unintended consequences have been routinely encountered in the past as a flow-on from colonial experience and have lasting consequences. The massive expansion and unprecedented scale of the current exchanges would suggest that significant impacts on client countries are therefore most likely, either in terms of reinforcing the position of political and technical elites, or by the creation of long-term structural dependencies.

A broad outline of the way in which Australia's collaborative research efforts with countries in Asia can be matched against the dramatic development of education markets is provided by bibliographic data and citation rates on jointly authored international scientific papers, combined with data on university-to-university agreements. The bibliometric data has accumulated since the early 1990s, and this provides some indication of where collaborative research was most productive, in terms of joint publication. Burke & Butler (1995) noted there were clear signs of an increasing share of world science emanating from Asia; however, many

regional countries were in the process of establishing collaborative links with countries other than Australia. Moreover, the data indicated that there was an absence of Australian basic science, as distinct from research and development, in the collaborative publications with Singapore, Taiwan, China, Japan, Korea and Thailand: 'We found no clear traces of any program of activity intended to place Australian basic research in the path of the major collaborations which Asian nations now routinely seek to have with the US and Europe many of which occur in fields in which Australia is very active' (Bourke & Butler 1995, 66). Follow-up work in this area suggests that similar trends in research linkage have continued (Butler 2004) in spite of growing educational exports to the region.

Since the bibliometric data has come available, the (former) Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) has begun to systematically collect statistics on international agreements formed between Australian and overseas universities, which it publishes as raw data (UA 2008, online). The data provides a measure of active and expected university-to-university exchange and collaboration.

Table 2: Formal university-to-university links (Australia-China, Australia-United States).

		<i>Student exchange</i>	<i>Study abroad</i>	<i>Staff exchange</i>	<i>Collaborative</i>
China	<i>Active</i>	315	115	235	235
	<i>Not Active</i>	163	363	243	243
United States	<i>Active</i>	483	193	539	577
	<i>Not active</i>	251	601	195	157

Student exchange indicates reciprocal movement of students, and study abroad is the one-way movement. Active/Non active indicates whether the agreement represents some activity.

Source: (UA 2008, online).

The trend in agreements follows a broadly similar pattern since the early 1990s, as reflected in 2003-2007. By 2007, the data shows that out of a total of 5,168 agreements, Australian universities had signed the largest single majority of agreements (1,115) with North-Western Europe. This also remained the fast growing area between 2003 and 2007 with the increase in the numbers of agreements with individual countries exceeding 30 percent, reflecting Australia's deep historical links with Europe. The second largest area in the number of total agreements was the Americas, and these also had high growth rates, especially Canada (32 percent). The single largest number of agreements with any one country exist between the US (760) followed by China (585), with China appearing to be growing at a faster rate than the US; however, this is deceptive. For instance, between 2003 and 2007, the total number of student exchanges grew while the relative proportion of collaborative activity actually declined. The way in which the statistics are aggregated (UA 2008, online) would indicate that China had a growth rate (13.8 percent) exceeding that of the US (9.4 percent). However, when these figures are broken down into their active and non-active components (Table 2), it can be seen that the growth in China is greatly inflated by a comparatively larger proportion of inactive collaborative agreements compared to the US. In other words, there is still much potential to be realised

in relation to China, compared to levels of student exchange. The opposite has been the case in the US where high levels of expectation about collaborative work tend to be fulfilled (Table 2).

The links with China grew rapidly from 1990 when some of the earliest collaborative ventures between China and Australia were being put in place. After China passed the Education Law of the People's Republic of China, setting down the principles and practices of formal education exchange and scientific cooperation (Jolley 1997, 194), the number of new agreements between Australia and China expanded five fold over the following year. Growth continued as the education market expanded but at a much less frenetic pace. Moreover, the links with North American and European institutions sustained strong growth in the absence of massive growth in education exports. The agreements with China were often in anticipation of closer collaboration that was not realised. The growth in China between 2003 and 2007 also offset a decline in collaboration with other parts of Asia, notably Indonesia (-25 percent) and Thailand (-12 percent). This general picture correlates with the bibliometric data that show that Australia's collaborative links are tied to its former historical and cultural associations rather than consolidating upon emerging prospects.

The data on citation rates shows that there has been a sharp increase in international collaboration between Australia and countries around the world, with collaboration rates more than doubling, and in some cases tripling, across all the sciences since the early 1980s. This is part of the post-war 'internationalisation of the academic profession' (Welch 2005, 71-77). However, the pattern of increasing collaboration is far from uniform. Linkages between Australia and the European Union, and Australia and the US continue to dominate. Depending on the discipline, these make up between about 75-85 percent of all scientific collaborative work leading to publication. This pattern changed little in the decade from the mid 1990s, though the links with China increased in some areas, notably engineering and information technology (Butler 2004). There was a slight increase in the number of jointly authored papers between Australian and Chinese scientists in the decade leading up to 2001, and this includes work in chemistry, earth sciences, physics and maths. This brought the overall share of collaborative links with China to about ten percent of all international joint publications. However, during that period, China has also moved ahead to become one of the top ten countries in some fields, such as mathematics, moving into fourth ranking (Butler 2004).

Distortion and disequilibrium

In summary, while Australia's links with China grew, the increase was marginal compared to the spectacular growth in Chinese science. There was also a lack of symmetry between the gross number of Chinese students coming to Australia and the number of cooperative agreements when compared to the level of 'follow through', measured in terms of more permanent research linkage. This lack of symmetry adds to the more general concern about imbalances created in the disciplinary mix, and this is

compounded by the lack of growth in postgraduate research in ways that correspond to the enormous growth in undergraduate study (Table 3, below). While the number of undergraduate awards for students from overseas more than tripled, the number of Doctorates by research was significantly less, though the number of Masters by research remained constant. At the same time, there was massive growth in coursework postgraduate degrees, which are less likely to generate ongoing science linkage than research degrees.

Table 3: Selected higher degrees by overseas and domestic students

<i>Level of Course</i>	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Overseas										
Doctorate by Research	579	639	593	647	610	643	662	788	955	994
Master's by Research	273	290	282	271	267	268	261	262	295	316
Master's by Coursework	3,548	5,048	6,313	7,709	10,889	13,845	17,028	22,608	24,313	28,417
Bachelor's Honours	383	351	402	632	439	592	741	736	877	850
Bachelor's Pass	10,126	12,341	14,914	16,308	18,868	21,045	24,141	27,484	31,548	32,460
Domestic										
Doctorate by Research	2,326	2,707	2,853	3,018	3,183	3,290	3,629	3,940	3,945	4,250
Master's by Research	1,494	1,485	1,354	1,389	1,374	1,326	1,290	1,331	1,275	1,260
Master's by Coursework	11,160	12,499	13,863	14,185	14,394	15,928	17,125	18,274	20,350	21,278
Bachelor's Honours	7,197	7,334	7,781	8,727	7,762	8,229	8,469	8,561	9,300	9,155
Bachelor's Pass	77,822	81,262	82,444	81,524	81,060	85,907	89,127	92,173	93,456	94,649

Source: DEST 2007.

This distorted picture of research linkage needs to be placed in the broader context of the massive expansion of education exports to the region, and what might be considered to be a strategic policy of neglect in regard to ensuring that opportunities for 'follow through' occur from the undergraduate level. From the start of the 'for profit' system, institutions took little responsibility for the welfare of foreign students, while the problems of 'ghettoisation', referred to earlier, grew worse. The climbing cost of courses forced some overseas students to attempt completing their studies in the shortest possible time, and along with other factors, this prevented mixing with Australians. A review of the literature by Australian Education International (AEI) summarised by Harman (2004) reveals a picture of two parallel streams of students proceeding through university: the Australian and the international.

Both are within close proximity, yet in the majority of cases, they have at best superficial contact and interaction. This adds to earlier findings that reveal some dissatisfaction and disappointment: the expectations of international students who had hoped to meet and form close friendships with Australian students, visit Australian homes and experience local culture first hand were not being realised (Harman 2004, 9). A group at Monash University reported in 2005 results from a study into social and economic security of international students, that 50 percent had experienced discrimination or bad treatment while in Australia, with bad treatment relating to discrimination and racism. Sixty five percent reported loneliness and isolation, while nine percent reported negatively to the question of whether they felt safe and secure while in Australia. Around a third had difficulty with language in relation to their academic work, 35 percent experienced financial difficulties while 77 percent wanted better information provided to prospective students, and 75 percent said there needed to be 'better backup systems' (Deumert et al 2005, 3).

Table 4: Changing International Student Experiences 1984 - 2005

<i>Problem areas</i>	Language competence	Financial difficulty	Discrimination	Loneliness	Feel unsafe
Survey 1984	25	26	14	26	-
Survey 2005	30	35	50	65	9

Figures are expressed as percentages. These surveys used different but comparable techniques.

Sources: Goldring (1984) and (Deumert et al 2005).

Research commissioned for the Goldring (1984, 31) report focussed on the very same issues and provides some basis for longitudinal comparisons (Table 4). This would indicate the deterioration, during the intervening period, in the overall experience of international students. In turn, this could reflect a change in the way Australians receive international students due to a decline in the general awareness and sensitivity to Asia. This is consistent with research into Australia's capacity to understand its nearest neighbours. The Asian Studies Association of Australia reported in 2002 the stagnation in Asian studies and the study of Asian languages. Isolated reports in the years that followed pointed to a continuing trend. No more than five per cent of Australian undergraduates encountered the systematic study of any aspect of Asia. Even fewer, less than three per cent, studied an Asian language, which was far from the target of 10 percent for 2000 (Fitzgerald et al 2002, 42). The main cause was seen to be budget stringencies leading to a contraction of subjects devoted to Asia, while the pool of Asia specialists was shrinking due to retirements and the lure of overseas posts. Some language areas fared better than others, Japanese being the most popular, though in-depth study of Japanese and northeast Asian society, politics and culture was not widespread. The number of students studying China, or a Chinese language, made up a tiny fraction of less than two per cent of all undergraduates. The report noted that while Chinese and Japanese were 'relatively secure', the teaching of languages in areas of lower demand, such as Indonesian, was in danger at a number of universities (Fitzgerald et al 2002, xv-xvi).

The Australian Society of Indonesian Language Educators conference in 2005 was told that the overall state of Indonesian language study, though it

varied across the country and at different educational levels, was in stark decline (Hill 2005, 41). A series of events from 1997, including the bombings in Bali and Jakarta, represented a cascade of negatives, exploited by a sensationalist media. Even committed Indonesian teachers faced resistance within their schools from parent groups and students influenced by public opinion. Indonesia had not helped by banning two Australian academics or by making research visas hard to obtain. By the end of the Coalition government in late 2007, the picture of Asian studies in Australia was one of systematic decline, while the superficial treatment of Asian matters, such as in business and tourism courses, was proliferating. In spite of calls for urgent action to protect Australia's Asian knowledge base, the 2007 House of Representatives inquiry into service industry exports responded by recommending increased promotional activities for educational exports (HR 2007, 143-4), reflecting the persistence in the attitude of seeing knowledge as a commodity.

In response to market demand, there was a massive growth of courses serving international students, even though these were likely to focus on a narrow band of vocational areas that provide immediate cash flow benefits. Due to rising concerns over quality, new institutional arrangements were introduced under the Education Services for Overseas Student Act 2000. This was ostensibly to protect those coming to Australia on student visas under the process of quality auditing, while allaying domestic fears that the system was becoming a diploma mill that provided easy access through Australia's immigration processes. However, the main function proved to be in marketing, by reassuring overseas customers that Australian higher education was being carefully monitored (Vidovich 2002, 405). Along with other factors, including the lack of an intermediary higher education authority, the process of constant review, reform and change over recent decades, and the growing regulatory burden of compliance, the process of quality assurance became a paper shuffling exercise. Without additional resources or better planning, universities were struggling to properly meet their actual requirements (Vidovich 2002, 405; Reid 2004, 4). In spite of rhetoric surrounding the benefits of cultural exchange and the 'internationalising' of the curriculum, few Australian students travel abroad to study. Moreover, even though on some campuses more than a third of students are from families where English is not the main language spoken, there exists 'little evidence of profound curriculum change' (Marginson 2002, 424). In many respects, the reverse is occurring at a time when the need for stronger and longer lasting relations is critical.

Australia's closer alignment with the US over recent decades, and the shift away from regional integration, has undermined moves towards building institutional structures to assist and promote closer research linkage at the regional level. Such a move could be seen, however, as a natural progression being driven by regional economic and social forces. While regional integration continued on many levels, including all manner of trade, the work towards institutional development – at the symbolic and diplomatic level – is patchy and unfinished. Instead, Australia's close alignment with the US has served to reinforce old prejudices, casting Australia as an 'outsider': a supplier of commodities rather than any kind of partner, and 'insider'.

Conclusion

Australia was a catalyst in the expansion of higher education exports across the region. It provided a model, which in combination with advice from international bodies, including UNESCO, the World Bank, the OECD and the Asian Development Bank (Marginson & Rhoades 2002, 295; Jolley 1997, 137), led others to follow suit. However, many of the advantages of being a pioneer began to slide away as competition grew, both from countries within the region and those in the northern hemisphere. This has forced Australia to press whatever competitive advantages it might possess in terms of geographic proximity, long-term historical association and shared regional aspirations. Success on these fronts depends much more on the extent to which Australia is able to build and consolidate structural relations, a large part of which may be brought about by forming strategic research linkages. The above discussion shows that failures from the past relate to a series of linked problems. The first stems from the sudden influx of high concentrations of foreign students. This has tended to narrow, rather than widen, the proportionate scope for cultural integration, due to the effects of social polarisation. Compounding this is a lack of strategic investment in Asian languages and cultural studies, causing two effects: preventing greater outward student exchange to Asia, and generally limiting the receptivity within Australia to Asian cultural integration. These problems then create a third problem, or dilemma, which is that they leave undone the preparatory work for more intense research linkage that may be generated in the first instance through postgraduate and post-doctoral activities, as an extension to undergraduate exchange. Moreover, the regional institutional infrastructure that can facilitate and extend this process, by priority setting and providing stakeholder linkages, has languished.

In regional terms, Australia has one of the most sophisticated higher education and science policy capacities, and the inability to translate this into the better coordination of regional policymaking has been a great failure in diplomacy and leadership. This is the direct outcome of what has been a mixture of neglect and overblown ambition, as was the case with the effort to create almost single-handedly a regional community through APEC. A midway course of integration and cooperation would have aimed to build upon some of the goodwill gained through education linkages, developed over a century, and the increase in economic ties, in order to consolidate scientific cooperation across a broad front. Australia's relatively well-developed capacity and experience in managing a complex national innovation system might help solve looming problems in the region, but this task is difficult in the absence of an overarching regional organisation. One key problem relates to the acknowledged need to put in place more coherent higher education, science and technology policies that enhance creativity and productivity, and this is especially the case with China (OECD 2007). Adopting this approach is certain to generate other benefits in terms of citizenship and social equity. The mechanisms for closer cooperation and coordination that would allow Australia to play a key role in this process were advocated as part of APEC; however, the organisation failed to fully develop in this direction. No other

regional organisation as yet has the scope to take on this task, which has meant that the strategic focus of higher education planning across the region is fragmented.

In the light of this discussion, it is possible to articulate a number of principles. For instance, Australia possesses a mature and sophisticated research capacity built on very traditional European foundations. This is a product of its history, and one of the criticisms of its higher education system in the past has been that it was perhaps too traditional and too 'top heavy'. It was seen as elitist and possessing too great a capacity for fundamental research. As a result, reform over more than two decades has been geared towards changing aspects of this system, and often for the better. But in the process, many long-held traditions have been challenged, such as the importance of the university's civil role, and the need for autonomy. Moreover, in the process, the capacity for basic research within universities has declined, as a direct result of federal policies aimed at greater commercialisation (Quiddington 2008, forthcoming) However, those traditions and that capacity is of increasing importance to many Asian cultures as they progressively embrace more Western styles of higher learning. Each is coming to realise the importance of these traditions that often also relate to ideas of academic freedom and critical enquiry, being the wellsprings of creative and productive research, and these are the attributes that represented pathways to social and scientific innovation rather than mere technical excellence. It may be said that Australia's comparative advantage lies in the very attributes that it has been steadfastly eroding, inadvertently or otherwise, as a process of ongoing reform.

Moreover, as a result of this, the transformative capacity for higher learning, and Australia's ability to provide a democratic influence is being diminished in the process. What is overlooked is the potential within international cross-cultural environments for higher learning to generate new codes, and common conceptual schemes, in which different ideological outlooks can be renegotiated and perhaps reconciled. This formative capacity, through which structural conditions are elaborated, is the medium in which the bonds of regional community and some shared sense of identity can grow. Moreover, this capacity cannot be taken for granted in that it may not survive being subdivided and diluted as an export product. It exists within the whole environment, and culture, of the university, rather than in individual segments. That is, the civil capacity of higher learning does not derive from any single specialist pursuit or discipline, but grows out of the 'contest of the faculties' (Kant [1798] 1991). Traditions of scholarship, critical enquiry, adherence to academic democracy, intellectual independence and activism, are all together the most valuable inheritance of the Western university. The fact that this capacity and the habits of mind, and the values it gives rise to, are systematically discounted in the process of packaging higher education for export should be of concern. This constrains Australia's potential to contribute to the idea of democratic regionalism, and this runs directly counter to the nation's interest and the role it can play within the region.

END

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