Riding the Tiger of Higher Education Reform in Asia Pacific: Where are We Heading?

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Theme: Riding the Tiger

1. Throughout Asia we are riding the 'tiger' of higher education reform and change.
2. The 'tiger' is the pressure on Asian universities to gain in the race for world university rankings.
3. The 'tiger' is carrying us towards goals that may not reflect the aspirations of Asian societies, our universities or the people that work and study in them.
4. Climbing off the 'tiger' feels even more dangerous than hanging on.

Presentation Objectives

1. To examine the emergent global emphasis on world university ranking as a driver of change in higher education.
2. To discuss the response of Asian universities to this trend.
3. To assess consequences for higher education in the region.
4. To explore options for charting a more meaningful direction for higher education in Asia.

The 'Tiger' is a Systemic Problem

Systemic problems result from interconnected issues that operate across the overall system, rather than from a specific individual, or isolated factor.

Contrast this with problems that result from user error, mistakes, wrong information, skill deficits, a lack of information, or other operational errors. (Wikipedia, 2011)

The Top 100: Who wins, who loses?
Riding the Tiger of Higher Education Reform in Asia Pacific

World Ranking: A Service to Society?
- Companies saw an opportunity to profit from ranking universities
  - Times Education Supplement and US News and World Report sell newspapers and advertising
  - QS consulting sells services to the same universities they rank
- Began in USA in 1990s, spread to UK, and since 2005 turned into a global race to join top 100/200...
- Who’s benefiting from the race?

Journal Ranking Organizations
- Largely unknown in most of higher education less than a decade ago
- Conducted by companies and associations in different parts of the world, ranking process lacks consensus, reliability, validity, and transparency
- Results clearly reflect regional emphases and distortions (e.g., ISI/USA, ERIH/Europe, ERA/Aus)
- Process with no stakeholder accountability and high stakes effects has been embraced with a vengeance in Asia

Asia’s System Leaders Seek Top 100
- Riding the Tiger
  - In Asia, competition among universities drives interest in rankings
  - At national level, system leaders have embraced the goal of ‘top 100’ status with a range of new policies
  - RAIES impact future funding and pay for publication in privileged, ‘hi-impact journals’

How many can be top 100 uni’s?
- Small % of Asian uni’s in the top overall top 100
- How many uni’s can fit into the top 100?
- Should policies designed to achieve top 100 status be applied to all universities regardless of their mission?
- Unanticipated effects on the universities, education systems, research knowledge and societies?

What Gets Measured, Gets Done

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Rewards</th>
<th>China Context</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indexed in ISTP</td>
<td>$92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indexed in EI</td>
<td>$275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact factor &lt; 1</td>
<td>$306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ≤ IF &lt; 3</td>
<td>$458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 ≤ IF &lt; 5</td>
<td>$611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 ≤ IF &lt; 10</td>
<td>$764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IF ≥ 10</td>
<td>$2,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publish in Science</td>
<td>$30,562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or Nature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unanticipated Consequences

Reward for Publication
- In China, the system is focused entirely on a single dimension for judging quality — the Impact Factor...
- This may result in distortion and corruption of the publication system...
- Franck warned that when scientists’ success depends too heavily on citation counts, they will find ways to game the system...
- There are many ways of accumulating citations that have little to do with scientific value. [Link]

Consequences
- Rampant plagiarism
- Low-quality of journals
- Declining quality of research
- Reduced or misinformed impact of research findings
- Use of influence to ensure or deter publication
- Erratic publication
- Undeserved promotion
- Systemic corruption
- Wasted resources
Riding the Tiger of Higher Education
Reform in Asia Pacific

Publishers and Journals

- **Riding the Tiger**
  While scholars feel at the mercy of journals, the journals depend on ratings from Rating Agencies (e.g., SSCI) to get manuscripts from top scholars
- Journal access and recognition by Rating Agencies is, however, distorted by lack of reliability, transparency, validity, and accountability*

*ERA controversy in Australia

Individual Faculty Members

- **Riding the Tiger**
  Under pressure to raise research output, teachers reduce their time and effort for teaching and service
- No empirical evidence to support an assertion that increased research focus improves teaching
- Faculty motivation is often reduced and greater effort is expended ‘playing the game’

University Leadership is Distorted

- **Riding the Tiger**
  University leaders face the dilemma of reshaping their institutional priorities or risk losing funding and legitimacy
- This distorts institutional policies and can disconnect mission from activity and outcomes
- Leaders look on helplessly even when new KPIs are not suitable to the university’s core mission or level of the university’s development

How many scholars can publish in SSCI journals?

- **Illustration of an irrational race:**
  - >5,000 education leadership scholars globally*
  - ~ 15 SSCI journal outlets for education leadership publish ~ 450 articles annually*
  - Evidence of distortion and lack of access to these journals by Asian scholars**
- **Conclusion:** Stay on its back or climb down, most scholars will be eaten alive

Race is Not on a Level Playing Field

- The ‘metrics’ for measuring success in the race reflect Western values
- ‘Western’ universities have a head start in terms of human and financial resources
- Academic leaders are making choices that disadvantage their staff, universities and societies

Distribution of Ed Leadership Faculty

- N. America: ~2,600 scholars
- Europe: ~550 scholars
- Asia: ~800 scholars
- China: ~1,000 scholars
- ANZ: ~120 scholars
- S. America: ?
- Africa: ?
- Total: >5,000 scholars

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A Distorted Knowledge Base

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>25.48%</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td>17.64%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>13.72%</td>
<td>11.76%</td>
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</tbody>
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Impact on Asian Students and Society

- **Riding the Tiger**
  Students suffer, especially in tier 2, 3 & 4 institutions where the effort has shifted from teaching and service to research.
- **Are we meeting the needs of Asian students and societies?**

This system is by accident, not by design

- Where did the idea of ranking universities come from?
- Who was involved in generating the criteria and managing the system?
- This high stakes system is in the hands of people selling newspapers and consulting services.

This looks like it by accident, or by design?

Requires a Systemic Solution

- Systemic problems require change to the structure, organization or policies. (Wikipedia, 2011)
- Systemic solutions are difficult to initiate because of conflicting interests and lack of coordination across system parts.
- Only leadership can bring about this type of change, but where will it come from?

A Global Paradigm Shift is Unlikely

- We live in an age of metrics, measurement and accountability
- The Ranking Companies want to sell newspapers and advertising
- The winners (Top 100) are leading universities and have a stake in keeping a system of recognition in place

Leverage Points in the System

- University Faculty
- University Leaders
- System Leaders
- Journal Rating Companies
- World Ranking Companies
Leverage Points for Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bad News</th>
<th>Good News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✷ Ranking and Rating Companies have no incentive to initiate changes to current system</td>
<td>✷ Rating and Ranking Companies have no intrinsic stake in the criteria and will respond to pressure and publicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ System, university and faculty leadership is fragmented and uncoordinated</td>
<td>✷ Other actors have little stake in the current ‘system design’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Current ‘winners’ – nations or uni’s – have little incentive to change the game</td>
<td>✷ Moral leadership exercised outside the boundaries of specific universities could create a critical mass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Multiple parts of the system need to change to achieve a better result</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What’s Worth Fighting for Out There?*

The Middle Way is to ‘Change the Game’

- The scholarly community must gain some degree of input and monitoring over the rules of the game
- Change the ‘Ranking Game’ to reflect the reality of university development and social contribution
- Only by cooperation can the region’s university leaders create reciprocal pressure on other parts of the system

* Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998

Leader’s Dilemma: Are we powerless?

- “I see the negative effects but feel powerless to do anything.”
- In a systemic problem, I may be powerless, but ‘we’ are not.
- Only by acting together, can ‘we’ can change the game.