

Leading or Following? The Response of U.S. Universities to Globalization

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Colleagues from Asian universities are constantly surprised at the limited interest in the United States in international, particularly Asia Pacific, affairs. Students going abroad are small in number, courses related to the Asia Pacific region are limited or non-existent at many colleges and universities, and foreign language study is perceived to be a mountain to climb rather than a ticket to an exciting world. It is with this backdrop that the following remarks are made, for, while some universities consciously educate their students to be members of a global society, American universities as a whole are behind Asia Pacific institutions in educating our populace in the realities of a swiftly changing world. In the U. S. we have dealt for a long period with what Jack Van de Water from Oregon State University labels the “Gap Theory.” Essentially this means that there is a wide gap between the rhetoric of politicians and administrators and the concrete, budgetary support they give to internationalizing education in the United States. To highlight the difficulty in bridging this “gap” I will first share with you some personal experiences. As you will see, I am one of the fortunate ones.

In 1976 I took my first trip to China. The Cultural Revolution was in the midst of its last surge of remaking China yet again, Mao Zedong was alive, but just barely. Deng Xiaoping was about to be thrown out of power for the last time. In 1978 I visited again, and then in 1979 I moved to Henan Province to live as one of two foreigners in a small city, teaching English in a teachers’ college. It was the most stimulating and wonderful two years of my life. When I left in 1981 my life was changed, and I dedicated myself to the development of international education. Since then I have traveled widely, and have colleagues in universities around the world.

A few years after leaving China I was with my closest childhood friend in my hometown, a small, rural place in Tennessee. We watching our children play together. He looked at my half Chinese, half Caucasian children and told me how lucky I was to have had the chance to live abroad and see the world. I have thought about that conversation many times, wondering what was the difference between him and me. We had grown up across the street from each other, had the same teachers in school and the same friends. In retrospect I have concluded that indeed I was lucky, lucky to have had a few outstanding teachers who passionately wanted their students to explore the world and grow. Lucky to have found educators who used what few resources they had to help me get over the gap. Lucky to have begun my journey to China through the assigned reading of Edgar Snow’s *Red Star Over China*, a book that presented a whole new people and history to me in a lively and accessible

manner. I could not put it down, and thirsted for more. My friend did not meet a teacher in college who touched him as I was touched. He had no help in bridging that gap.

What is the message here on how we approach education? It centers on the paramount role of the individual teacher and the importance the university gives to placing the “international,” or perhaps today more appropriately the “global,” into the curriculum. A modern education is basically irrelevant without a strong international theme. In the case of universities represented at this conference, this means an especially dynamic Asia Pacific theme. Notice I did not say a strong international component. The days of dabbling in and isolating international studies within the curriculum should by now be long gone. We live in a globalized world that has changed dramatically in a few decades. National economies are merging, as in Europe. Corporations merge across national boundaries and impact life in even the smallest of our towns, such as Toyota in Kentucky, Nissan in Tennessee, Motorola in China, McDonalds and Starbucks everywhere.

Governments are less important than before, as NGOs make decisions that governments used to make. The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the WTO have influence on international matters that outstrip those of many single governments. Internet and satellite dish technology moves faster than any government can control or monitor effectively. Cultures are blurring, especially popular culture as the world imitates Hollywood, while at the same time “world music” radio programs spring up and have their own sections in Borders and Tower Records. Communication technology moves at the speed of light, both literally and figuratively. In communication, geo-political and cultural borders are basically irrelevant. I remember 15 years ago it sometimes took two days to reach my in-laws in Beijing by phone. Today we e-mail each other instantly, or call instantly if we want.

This past July my wife and I went to Mongolia on behalf of the University of Hawai'i to negotiate an exchange agreement with a government agency and graduate school. It is a country in dire need of economic transfusion, and they are struggling. But what did we encounter? We visited homes where families have their choice of Mongolian, Russian, Chinese or Italian TV stations. And MTV in a couple of languages. How many countries are represented on TV in the typical American home? In the classroom?

While in Mongolia we were honored to meet with the Kampo Lama from the second largest Buddhist monastery in the country. During one of our visits we asked him to bless prayer flags and scarves for our three children and ourselves. As he carefully folded each cloth he quietly chanted a mantra, very relaxing and spiritual. Then, just before he had all the cloths folded appropriately, his cell phone went off. He excused himself, stood up and reached inside his robe for the phone. After a minute or two, he returned and resumed the blessing. Somewhere out there a satellite put up by some country not his own gave him instant, and obviously important, contact with the world outside the monastery. And he spoke excellent English.

So, the Mongolian populace has its pick of television stations from around the world, and monks communicate instantly around the world. And they have come from practically standing still in this area 10 years ago, to this point now. How about us: how far have we come in our U.S. universities to prepare our students for these extraordinary changes? We have exchange programs, send a small number of students

abroad to study, require an international course or two, and recruit international students to our campus. These are important, but woefully inadequate for today. In fact, I believe we may be no more advanced today than a few decades ago when I was in college. As an example, look at the dramatic decrease in federal funding now allocated to the East-West Center in Honolulu. Twenty years ago 300 students received complete financial support, including paid study abroad opportunities, to engage in a graduate programs. Today the number has dropped to about fifty, and none have total East-West Center support.

We have to ask the question, have our curriculum and financial commitments caught up with this new world, or at least do we have plans to take it in the right direction? More importantly, are we positioned to play a leading role in shaping an informed response to these changes? Here we have to deal with the additional gap between those looking at the world in old, traditional forms, and those who see new realities brought on by quickening globalization. Assuming rhetoric is complemented by concrete financial support: we can lead only if we can grasp the changes facing us. For just as borders blur for traditional cultures and countries, so also they blur for universities, or at least they must blur if we are to survive.

Quickly, I will discuss two types of blurring we see all around us, first, in how we identify international education as an area of study. Let's focus on the Asia Pacific region. In my school of Hawaiian, Asian and Pacific Studies we are organized around specific, traditional lines. Centers for Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Philippine, Southeast Asian, Pacific Islands, South Asian and Hawaiian studies are what you will see in our catalogue. But this structure is becoming an inhibiting rather than a dynamic fixture, and we are going to have to change it soon to meet the changing world.

The changes are on two fronts. First, in immigrant and minority populations, manifested on campuses by programs in ethnic studies. I remember when I first came to our school 12 years ago the line between Asian studies and ethnic studies was clear and unshakable. You studied Japanese in Japan *or* you studied Japanese immigrants in Hawaii and the U.S. continent. It was the same for Filipinos, Tongans, Samaons, Chinese, and others. But we have come to see lately that this division is no longer viable. The economy of the Philippines is heavily dependent on immigrants sending money home, or contracting service workers to live for many years at a time in foreign countries. Confucian scholar Tu Wieming from Harvard University argues that it is the Diaspora Chinese that play the most important role in changing internal Chinese intellectual thought. People go back and forth and are living in multiple cultures, which creates new, confusing, but dynamic cultures. The lines are blurred, and our international curriculum has to face this reality. This reality is summed up clearly by Ritsumeikan Asian Pacific University President Kazuichi Sakamoto, when he states, "Diverse cultural exchange has been fundamental to creating new cultures, new civilizations and creative human resources that have contributed to the progress and advancement of human beings through the many experiences in its history." The creation of Asia Pacific University is an affirmation of that thought.

At the University of Hawaii we are trying to catch up to the new reality. The School of Hawaiian, Asian and Pacific Studies has recently been awarded a Ford Foundation grant to rethink how to teach and engage in research in area studies. When Taiwan investors, Japanese tourists, Filipino and Bangladeshi service workers,

and American hotel chains go into the tiny Pacific island of Palau, we have customarily focused on how Palau has changed. But that has been short sighted – for now we know that we must also look at how Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and the U. S. have changed by being in Palau, and what new realities have been established for both: migration back and forth, money back and forth, intercultural marriages. All of these scream out to us to see that the traditional way of looking at countries by only focusing on the dominant, or host culture, or only on the immigrant, is to turn away from the reality that *everyone* is impacted, and every country is changed.

Through this grant we are establishing multi-sited virtual classrooms that connect faculty and students at the University of Hawaii to their counterparts in Fiji, New Zealand, Palau, the Philippines, and Singapore. The first multi-sited teaching experiment to result from the Moving Cultures initiative commenced this fall and involved a collaboration between University of Hawaii and Canterbury University in Christchurch, New Zealand. The project features a jointly developed interactive module inserted into existing undergraduate courses being taught on the two campuses. For a four-week period, participants on the two campuses worked collaboratively to study labor migration issues using web-based technologies. Discussions are now taking place with the National University of Singapore to expand this initiative there. Plans had been underway to expand to Fiji, but recent political turmoil has put that collaboration on hold.

As exciting as these developments are, we must not be so limiting in our vision. Therefore, the second issue I want to address is the necessity of looking at major systemic changes in our universities if we are to play a constructive role in the new globalization. Visiting Beijing University recently I discussed with the Director of their international office the possibility of offering joint degrees in Chinese studies between our two schools. I discussed the American University/Ritsumeikan joint degree in Japanese studies as an example. He thought this was a good idea, but mostly he wanted to talk about a joint *university*, not just programs. He informed me that Beijing University and the University of California at Berkeley were looking at property in the coastal city of Qingdao to establish a new international university. I thought I was coming with a progressive proposal. I left acknowledging that once again internationalization was moving faster than I could keep up. There will be a day when the university as we know it will be so changed that we will not recognize it because the most effective institutions will be those that are jointly and internationally operated, on an equal footing, and teaching internationally will not be an issue. It will be the norm.

But that is down the road. In the meantime, those of us who appreciate the importance and promise of a dynamic international curriculum must jump into the fray and strive to show how the changes taking place impact us even at the most local levels. We must gather with those forward-looking faculty and administrators who see well beyond their own national and cultural borders, beyond their narrow, self-defined academic or scholarly interests and structures, and venture into new areas of connected realities. While engaged in that, we must insist that universities lead in showing the ever-changing realities of globalization, showing how national, cultural, ethnic, and economic borders are not what they were only a few years ago. Spirited and effective leadership from universities can open the door to some exciting

possibilities throughout the world. U. S. Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, a strong proponent of international education, said recently, "For much of the last 50 years international education was often defined by Cold War imperatives. Now, we are in a new time and much of the world fortunately is at peace. Let us use this time wisely and define a new set of principles for international education that respond to the contemporary challenges of our time. Principles that encourage intellectual freedom, democracy building, human rights, the peaceful resolution of disputes, cultural diversity and a willingness to see the advance of education for the good of all, including the millions of children in the developing world who have no schooling." We can come close to this ideal only if we respond to the changes through knowledge and understanding, areas in which universities are presumed to lead. We can come close only if we constantly remind the Secretary for Education, Congress and individual campus administrators that the gap between exciting rhetoric and meaningful and dynamic action is much too wide if the resources are not equal to the talk.

To conclude: (1) the importance of the dynamic, individual teacher or administrator who opens the door of global understanding to students can never be underestimated, and these educators should receive our highest level of support. (2) International education, and for our purposes here, Asia Pacific studies in particular, can no longer be sectionalized and isolated into neat country and cultural categories. We live in a world where national, cultural and economic borders are now blurred and, at the same time dynamic. And (3), universities must lead the way in pointing out these changes, help explain the changes to others, and do what we can to see that the changes are guided toward the best interest of our peoples and our environment. To accomplish this we must receive the resources to close the gap between well meaning, but hollow rhetoric, and concrete action that takes us forward. To quote a recent study published in the U. S., "Globalization cannot be stopped ... Globalization is not something we get to vote on." In other words, get on the train and enjoy the ride, because the train *has* left the station. To ignore this is to allow our universities to be, at best, disadvantaged, and at worst, irrelevant.