UNESCO Bangkok, I was put in contact with several highly capable country specialists. I also remain grateful to a number of individuals at Greenwood Press for their assistance, especially Mary Ann Larcada who helped us sail and Debra Adams who kept us afloat. Finally, Jason and I would like to express our sincere thanks to Mr. Hayes Tang for assisting us with a multitude of communications, checking, and record keeping.

REFERENCES

Chapter 1
CONTEXTS AND REFORMS IN EAST ASIAN EDUCATION—MAKING THE MOVE FROM PERIPHERY TO CORE
Gerard A. Postiglione and Jason Tan

There may be a good deal of truth to the well-known stereotype about East Asian education (Tu, 1996). Schoolchildren in Singapore and Hong Kong nearly lead the world in mathematics and science achievement (USDOE, 1999, 2007; OECD, 2000, 2004; Ruzzi, 2005; Thao Lê and Li Shi, 2006). Those in the northeast Asian powerhouse economies of Japan and South Korea are also near the top of the international rankings, and mainland China is rising quickly. Asian students overwhelmingly populate prestigious graduate schools of science and engineering at leading American universities (Johnson, 1993; Nash, 1994; Li, 2006). In short, the school systems of China (including the Mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan), Japan, South Korea, and Singapore have already demonstrated the potential to challenge national school systems in other parts of the world. Malaysia and Thailand may not be far behind and fresh attention is being focused on schooling in the vast island nations of Indonesia and Philippines, as well as the transitional economies of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Though not all countries fit the East Asian stereotype, nonetheless, many are central players in a region that also includes such diverse countries as Brunei, Mongolia, Myanmar, North Korea, and the newest member of the United Nations—Timor Leste. As East Asia continues to consolidate itself within the major regional divisions of the global economy, the education systems of these countries will increase their regional cooperation and interactions (Fung et al., 2000).

Despite the stereotype, education and social development across East Asia has been highly uneven, with each country’s sociocultural context contributing differentially to its academic results. Moreover, the massification of schooling has placed added pressure on schools to not only address social development needs but also to promote the capacity for innovative thinking within the volatile global environment of competitive market economies (Suárez-Orozco and
Qin-Hillard, 2004). While the educational achievements of some nations are highly notable and may be attributed to traditional values, the lack of academic success in other countries has as much to do with the sociocultural context as with traditional values (Cummings, 2003). In each case, it is necessary to consider the way a country weathered colonialism before it strengthened statehood amid new international alliances. Even with the diverse religious and ideological orientations, and rapid sociopolitical transitions, East Asian societies, with few exceptions, are noted for executive-led government, consensus-driven management styles, and gradual but steady struggles to democratize within slowly incubating civil societies (Henderson, 2004; Watson, 2004). As the chapters in this volume illustrate, perspectives on cultural values and the historical experiences with colonialism still constitute the context and core of much debate about school reform, especially as countries grapple with overlapping educational philosophies, rapid curriculum change, newly promoted learning methods, bilingual teaching demands, intensified assessment procedures, and school-based management practices (Cookson et al., 1992; Cummings, 2003). Meanwhile, macroscopic theories such as globalization, decentralization, and privatization continue to weave their way into a landscape of discourse on school reform, with results across the region that defy simple generalizations (Mok, 2004; Björk, 2006).

How East Asian countries reconcile their historical transitions with the contemporary challenges of educational reform within rapidly changing global conditions remains a formidable area for exploration (Thomas and Postlethwaite, 1983; Tan and Mingat, 1992; Morris and Sweeting, 1995; Cummings and Altbach, 1997; Peng et al., 2006; Mok, 2006). The chapters explore how sociohistorical contexts, including cultural traditions, colonial experiences, and postcolonial transformations, have shaped educational changes. At the very least, the voices in the 17 chapters that follow resist a monolithic viewpoint on education and social change in East Asia. Yet, they confirm that school policies and practices are seldom, if ever, autonomous from their sociocultural contexts. In the case of higher education, the sociocultural context is also driven by a world system in which some Asian nations, with their national flagship universities, aspire to move from periphery to core (Postiglione and Mak, 1997; Postiglione, 2006b).

It is apt to begin this introduction with East Asia’s rising giant (Guthrie, 2006). Contemporary China carries the heavy burden of being the oldest continuing civilization on the planet bent on re-attaining the global status it once held (Hayhoe, 1992). As Zhou (Chapter 4) points out, China has the largest school population in the world, with educational practices that are firmly grounded in long held Confucian values. Although China’s consciousness of itself as a multiethnic state has become more prominent, its most valued cultural capital is that anchored in the heritage of the majority Han Chinese (Mackerras, 1994, 1995). Its economic rise has meant more funding for education. However, the proportion of GDP for education has remained far below that in other developing countries. Meanwhile, the growing attention that accompanies its economic rise is matched by a growing global interest in its cultural traditions, including the ideal of the Chinese learner (Watkins and Biggs, 1996, 2001). China’s educational values and traditional practices span the millennia and have left a deep impression on other regional systems. These not only include the Chinese societies of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan but also Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. The international significance of China’s educational values and practices cannot be underestimated, as testified to by the new soft power that has come with the establishment of over 100 Confucian institutes around the world (Yang, 2007).

In a world in which schooling is considered to be an equalizer, Chinese cling to the belief that diligent study can overcome social obstacles such as family background, religion, gender, and ethnicity. This idea can be tracked back as far as Confucius, who argued that “In education, there should be no distinction of classes” (有教无类) (Legge, 1790). This formed the basis for the imperial examination system with its roots in the Song Dynasty over a thousand years ago. In a study of the Qing Dynasty, the noted historian Chang Cheng Li (1963) pointed out that: “The examination system did indeed make possible a certain ‘equality of opportunity,’ but the advantages were heavily in favor of those who had wealth and influence.” This view has as much relevance today as it had during the Qing era. Schooling in the socialist market economy of China has become increasingly dependent on household wealth and family income. One of the greatest challenges since the dismantling of the imperial examination system in 1905 has been to establish an education system able to reconcile the essence of Chinese culture with the ways of the outside world. Semi-colonialism left its mark on China and contributed to an ideological battle that lasted beyond the Chinese civil war. Chairman Mao Zedong saw schools as a bulwark against colonialism, capitalism, and dependency, as well as a means to ensure social equality among the masses. Despite the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution, China’s education system came to be seen by the World Bank as a model for the developing world (Pepper, 1996). The reform and opening of China to the outside world that began in the late 1970s radically changed the direction of schooling (Postiglione and Lee, 1995). Economic reforms that made way for market forces created a larger role for schools in social stratification systems. Fee paying education became the norm and once more, private schools for the middle class families became a reality. Balancing social inequalities place more pressure on schools to provide quality schooling for all, including the children within China’s 100 million ethnic minority population (Postiglione, 1999, 2006a). Schools are viewed as playing a key role in restoring China to its historical position as a leading nation, but Chinese have retained the idea that education provides fair and equal opportunity based on merit with diligence and hard work being the key determinants of success.

Small but mighty, Hong Kong has always been a part of China except for 155 years of colonial rule (Postiglione and Tang, 1997). In 1997, it became a Special Administrative Region of China with a great deal of autonomy in most
spheres, including education. Hong Kong has not escaped historical traditions superimposed upon a colonial social-cultural landscape. Hong Kong moved from privately resourced schools to a public school system with management by a diverse collection of organizations, especially during the 1970s when nine-year compulsory education was made compulsory (Sweeting, 1990, 2004). Meanwhile, its postsecondary system, including a growing number of universities with high levels of institutional autonomy, correspondingly expanded and diversified. The core beliefs, as identified by Law (Chapter 5), are “educational developments in response to changing economic and/or sociopolitical needs; a struggle among concerns about access, efficiency, equity, quality, and catering for diverse learning needs; struggles among nongovernment actors in sponsoring and managing public schools; and the controversy of using English or Chinese as the medium of instruction.” As an immigrant society under colonial rule, Hong Kong was conservative of many Chinese traditions, but added an overlay of Westernized, largely British school system features (Postiglione, 1991; Zheng et al., 2001). Law remarks on the fragility of mutual trust among education stakeholders in Hong Kong, something that might have roots in the colonial era. While Hong Kong maintains the distinction of being ranked at the top of the world in mathematics achievement, it struggles with how to maintain that status while moving toward promotion of innovative learning styles of the kind it believes can ensure its 21st century survival without natural resources and heavy manufacturing. Its close neighbor Macao, even tinier and wed to a casino-driven tourist economy, has similar hiccups from its three hundred plus-year colonial period under the Portuguese that was severed in 1999. Hong Kong and Macao are the last regions of East Asia in the 20th century to have shed the colonial title. Each was dynastic sovereign territory until foreign colonies became established. In both cases, Chinese schools continued to exist amid colonial governance. Ironically, the retrocession of territorial sovereignty led to a more determined effort to emphasize Western style school reforms, largely due to determined efforts to cultivate problem solvers and innovative thinkers to support a rising economy within the global community. To this day, Hong Kong remains in denial about its educational inequalities, while even its Gini coefficient is one of the highest in the world. Although technically not in Northeast Asia, Hong Kong is included here because it is part of China. Yet, it is a significant integrative economy of Southeast Asia, where it shares a colonial heritage with Singapore and Malaysia, something that has influenced the structure of its school system to this day, including the medium of instruction.

Taiwan continues to be affected by the unsettled cross-strait relationship with the Chinese mainland, but has a common historical tradition influenced by Confucian values. As Chou and Ho (Chapter 15) notes, these include political authoritarianism, the family, examinations, saving habits, local organization, and social networks. Within this configuration of enduring values is the belief that education involves, above all else, hard work and effort. Chinese students were expected to be diligent, persistent, and cultivated. The luminescent development path taken by Taiwan as it moved from an authoritarian to democratic sociopolitical system of governance did ripple into the arena of school reform and can be seen in debates over many issues ranging from the medium of instruction, the interpretation of Taiwan history and identity, and the degree of managerial autonomy for schools. The policy agenda in more recent times has been deeply affected by the twin ideologies of globalization and localization. Like other East Asian societies with a Confucian heritage, Taiwan has tried to reconcile its traditional stress on examinations with new thinking about what constitutes meaningful learning. Yet, family resources continue to reinforce the school’s role as a selection agency with cram school fees becoming a fixed expenditure of Taiwan families. Chou points out that gender equity in access to higher education has steadily increased, but the proportion of indigenous peoples gaining access to higher education is barely half of that within the mainstream population.

Japan continues to be the most successful economy and education system in East Asia. As early as 1905, China used Japan’s school system as a model for its early development of a republic. Akira Arimoto reminds us that even before the Meiji restoration, a period associated with the establishment of a modern Japanese education system, the common people of the Tokugawa Era gave education a great deal of attention. Its temples for children’s education were effective and literacy rates exceeded those in Western countries. The Meiji restoration’s system of compulsory education actually confronted resistance and low enrollment rates in many rural areas. In this sense, Arimoto (Chapter 7) echoes other scholars of Japanese education that “the Tokugawa era became the foundation for modern Japanese education beyond the Meiji Restoration.” Eventually, Meiji schooling became viewed as a modern selection system for upward social mobility and tilted Japan’s schooling from ascension-based to achievement-based selection. Japan has become, as Arimoto calls it, a degree-orientated society with its accompanying educational pathology. Japan is one of the few East Asian countries not colonized, but its education system experienced a major transition from a republic to postwar periods. The postwar educational system was restructured by an education basic law with detailed provisions, for equal opportunity, including for male and female students; compulsory schooling for all; cooperation among school, family, and the community; education for nation-building; religious education; and responsibilities for national and local governments. Japan has demonstrated an uncanny talent for borrowing and adapting knowledge. Centuries of interactions with neighbors, including China and Korea, show a fundamental pattern of placing a high value on mastering and adapting foreign knowledge and techniques. The parts of this process include imitation, examination, criticism, and innovation. The optimism in Japan is wed to the challenges of mastering this process of which education is a part. Looking ahead, there is a renewed emphasis in schools for building patriotism.

Like Japan, Korea has long ago been highly influenced by its neighboring lands (Fairbank et al., 1989). The cultural influence of China’s Tang Dynasty remains evident in language and culture. In a different sense, the colonial period of
Japanese occupation is also not easily forgotten or forgiven. Globalization has brought South Korea closer to its traditional neighbors while the North Korean regime remains a question mark, despite some signs of a reform orientation after many years of isolation. After 35 years of Japanese colonial rule, Korea had to dig itself out of the devastation of the Korean War at mid-century that split it in two and resulted in two divergent paths of development that continue to the present. The South Korean peninsula placed its national focus on universal education to overcome mass illiteracy, lasting into the 1970s, after which it moved rapidly into an expansion of secondary education to meet the human resource needs of its rapidly developing economy. Amid periodic political turmoil, the public demand for greater education opportunities, including in higher education, led to an expansion that made South Korea virtually the first universal system of higher education in East Asia. Choi (Chapter 14) notes Koreans’ positive outlook and unwavering faith in academic credentials. Since the turn of the century, South Korea has been riveted on the education challenges of the global economy. Korean education is most impressive at the primary and secondary level and least at the tertiary level. South Korea has achieved an extraordinary transformation to become one of the most highly schooled countries in the world. Its elementary and secondary students score high in mathematics and science on international tests and the gender gap has narrowed. Teachers are generally well trained and indicators like dropout rates and school violence are relatively low. University education is subject to extreme competition and low quality. Efforts, including intensive internationalization, are under way in an effort to build world-class universities. An obsession with education created rapid expansion and contributed to both national development and social problems. The linking of educational credentials to the traditional values of Confucian scholars limited the attraction of vocational-technical education. Intense pressure for educational attainment created a competitive entrance examination system. The result was enormous pressure on students and a financial burden on families, as well as a stifled reform effort to promote innovative education. Those unhappy with the system found alternatives in the expanding study-abroad trend. This further intensified social stratification with English-speaking Koreans in an advantaged position.

Meanwhile North Korea continues to inch forward at a snail’s pace in educational reform. However, the passion for education in the North is no less intense. With an ideology of self-reliance and self-reliance, communism remains a determinant force. Three quarters of the way through the 20th century, the North had achieved universal basic education. Nevertheless, social background played a large part in determining opportunity. Party members and urban residents retain a distinct advantage over others. As Reed and Kim (Chapter 11) makes clear, the striking feature of education in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) is its isolation within a political system virtually bereft of international interface. Most of the economy remains state run, as are schools. However, Reed believes the DPRK is gradually emerging from its isolation with possibly profound implications for education. While globalization is opposed,
McCloud, 1995). Nevertheless, there are some pronounced patterns across systems. Beginning with national roots and colonial experiences, the education systems in Singapore and Hong Kong, share an affinity with Chinese intellectual values and, with Malaysia, also share a British colonial heritage. Yet, all have taken on more standardized aspects of global education systems as they aspire to be internationally competitive. While education in Vietnam shares a Chinese heritage with Hong Kong and Singapore, it also has its own indigenous tradition with an overlay of colonial French and Soviet-Russian themes. Indonesia completely shed Dutch colonial influence, where Islam has remained a salient factor in development. Thailand was never colonized, though the debates about future direction wrestle with the issue of globalization and how to emphasize local wisdom in education. The Christian influence on Philippine education remains a salient historical theme as its American colonial heritage. Meanwhile, Southeast Asian education can hardly escape the increasing effect of its neighboring giants, China and India.

In Vietnam, postcolonial educational expansion has been repeated (Pham, 1988). A state socialist welfare regime developed from the 1940s and 1950s in northern Vietnam, and later on a national basis after the reunification of the entire country in 1975 (Dang, 1997). London (Chapter 18) points out how Vietnam’s Communist Party promoted mass education as a basic right of citizenship, and centralized educational governance. Despite these measures, inequalities continued to exist in terms of provision at the regional level, in terms of scope and quality, and access across different population segments. In reality, the provision of social services privileged the political elite and urban-based state-sector workers over all others. While the gradual collapse of the planned economy and the transition to a market economy that began in the 1980s has meant greater investments in mass education and improvements in education access, new inequalities in enrollment and financing have emerged as a result of the unequal distribution of the fruits of economic expansion. Clear differences have emerged between the principles and institutions of the state socialist and Marxist Leninist regimes in terms of the state’s educational finance. A greater proportion of the burden of education finance has been shifted from the state onto households. This increased household responsibility has in turn fuelled the development and reproduction of inequalities of access to upper secondary education.

The Philippines is typical of Southeast Asian nations in having a Spanish and American colonial past, in addition to being the only Asian nation with a Roman Catholic majority. Spanish colonization over the course of 333 years left a lasting legacy of religious education and the foundations of higher education. Various religious orders such as the Augustinians, the Francisca, the Jesuits, and the Dominicans established parish schools to teach Christian doctrine. The Spanish period also saw the establishment of a few colleges such as the Colegio de Santo Tomas, later to become the University of Santo Tomas. The beginnings of a national public school system were inaugurated by the passing of a royal decree in 1863. By the end of the 19th century, the Philippines had a higher literacy level than some European nations. The Americans, who ruled for almost 50 years, further entrenched a national public school system with the passing of the Education Act of 1901. The first quarter of the 20th century completed the template that contemporary Philippine education continues to follow. Another key legacy was the use of the English language as a medium of instruction in a multilingual country that lacked a lingua franca at the time. Despite several attempts over the 1900s to institute reforms such as decentralization of education governance, and improving efficiency and equity of education services, implementation has been patchy. Torralba, Dumol and Manzon (Chapter 12) attribute the patchiness to a lack of political will, political instability, excessive political interference by various parties, and economic constraints.

Singapore presents an interesting case of a city-state with a government that firmly believes in keeping a tight rein on the national education system. The first two postindependence decades were spent centralizing authority over a hitherto disparate set of parallel systems operating in different language media under British colonial rule. Various measures taken included standardizing such aspects as subject curricula, national examinations, teacher qualifications, and eventually making the English language the primary medium of instruction in all schools. The focus began shifting in the mid-1980s toward encouraging more diversity in educational pathways and curricula. These measures included the introduction of independent schools and autonomous schools. Nevertheless, as Tan (Chapter 14) notes, the strong hand of the state remained in order to steer the education system in the direction of supporting national economic development plans and fostering social cohesion (Tan, 2004). From the mid-1990s a series of large-scale educational reforms such as Thinking Schools, Learning Nation and National Education were launched to meet the perceived needs of the knowledge economy while at the same time fostering social cohesion in a culturally diverse sphere. There is currently official recognition and support for fundamental changes in teaching and learning. However, the success of undertaking such changes in schools that have been largely driven by traditional notions of examination success remains patchy.

Like Singapore, Malaysia was colonized by Great Britain before gaining political independence. The two countries share a common dilemma of how to integrate an ethnically, linguistically, religiously and culturally diverse populace. Their approaches to this dilemma have diverged considerably over the past four decades. Following ethnic clashes in 1969, the Malaysian government introduced affirmative action policies in employment and education to redress the socioeconomic disparities between the native bumiputera majority and the non-bumiputera ethnic minorities. For instance, bumiputeras received, and continue to receive, preferential treatment in scholarship awards and entry to higher education. In addition, the Malay language was institutionalized as the predominant medium of instruction in national schools. In his chapter, Loo (Chapter 9) points out that although Malaysia has made advances in providing universal access to education, the policy of affirmative action remains highly emotive and
controversial. There are allegations that the policy has proved ethnically divisive, and has downplayed individual merit in favor of ethnic affiliation. Furthermore, the national school system has failed as an instrument of national integration. The majority of ethnic Chinese, who constitute about a quarter of the total population, enroll their children in Chinese-medium primary schools, while the vast majority of bumiputera children are enrolled in the national schools. In recent years, the English language has been reinstated as the medium of instruction for mathematics and science in order to boost national economic competitiveness.

Another Southeast Asian country with a British colonial past is Brunei, a tiny oil-rich Malay-Islamic monarchy. Prior to the attainment of full political sovereignty in 1984, there were essentially three parallel education systems: a secular government system, an Islamic system, and a system of Arabic schools. These schools continue to exist currently, in addition to independent schools. Like Singapore, Brunei's government continues to retain British colonial influence in the form of the General Certificate of Education Ordinary and Advanced Level examinations. Tight government control comes in the form of the Melayu Islam Beraja (Malay Islamic Monarchy) national ideology, which is perpetuated through the schools. Upex (Chapter 2) points out several major problems facing Brunei's economy, such as an overdependence on petroleum industry, a bloated public sector, and a mismatch between educational qualifications and labor market needs. The generous welfare system (locally nicknamed Shellfare) is beginning to show cracks due to rapid population increases and internal spending problems. The chapter points out a key dilemma facing Brunei education: reconciling the need to modernize and prepare a skilled knowledgeable workforce with the current emphasis on feudalism and institutionalized religion. Other urgent areas of need include changing the top-down management approach, improving teacher professionalism and morale, and changing the examination-oriented mode of teaching and learning.

Indonesia, like Brunei, has a majority Muslim population. In fact, it has the world's largest Muslim population, even while remaining an officially secular state. Dutch colonialism maintained a centralized and elitist schooling system, with limited opportunities for the poor, rural, or non-European populations. Independence in 1945 brought about a determination to maintain centralized governance in order to hold together a large culturally diverse population spread over 6,000 islands. The government under President Sukarno faced the onerous task of overcoming a massive illiteracy problem while lacking any lingua franca for effective communication. Also lacking were financial resources, physical infrastructure, and trained teachers. Christiano and Cummings (Chapter 6) explain that the primary task facing schools was to foster a uniquely Indonesian identity through the use of a common lingua franca, Bahasa Indonesia, and the propagation of the national ideology Pancasila. Sukarno's successor, Suharto, continued the policy of having education serve a key nation-building function. The first major step toward loosening tight centralized control of schools nationwide came with the promulgation of regulations in 1994 authorizing local
development assistance agencies. Educational enrollments have increased at primary, secondary, and higher education levels. In this respect, Sohleak and Clayton (Chapter 3) give particular attention to the education of girls and use this as a prism with which to see the historical transformation of schooling in Cambodia.

Laos shares a French colonial heritage with Cambodia and Vietnam. The French colonial authorities preserved the traditional wat schools, which they viewed as a means of preserving traditional religion and culture. Lessons in secular schools were conducted mainly in French. Similar to these two other former French colonies, the various post-independence governments began expanding educational access. The Royal Lao government announced in 1951 that primary education would be compulsory and would be conducted in the Lao language, while secondary education would continue in French. However, secondary enrollments continued to be rather limited. Schooling under the Pathet Lao from the mid-1950s was focused on Marxist-Leninist revolutionary propaganda, and on socializing the non-Lao ethnic minorities into good socialists. The advent of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic in 1975 meant that education was to play a major socializing role for national integration and nationalism in a socialist country. Educational access improved tremendously, especially in rural areas. However, educational quality remained rather low, mainly because of a lack of textbooks and skilled teachers. The introduction of the New Economic Mechanism in 1985 meant the reorientation of the education system toward meeting the needs of the free labor market, even while attempting to produce loyal revolutionary socialist citizens. Manynooch Faming (Chapter 8) shows that particular attention was paid to the schooling of non-Lao ethnic minorities in order to integrate and “civilize” them.

Thailand presents an interesting case of a country that has never been formally colonized. In traditional Thai society, centers of learning were houses, temples and the palace rather than schools. Houses prepared children with practical work-oriented skills, temples focused on moral education and ethics, while the palace provided education in governmental ethics. Nevertheless, European ideals of schooling began permeating Thai society in the last quarter of the 19th century, with the formal establishment of the first royal school in 1871 and the first public school in 1884. Over the course of 60 years, schools were established all over the country and a supervisory system put in place to oversee the expansion of schooling. The introduction of democratic institutions in 1932 led to greater attention being paid to equal educational opportunities and expansion of enrolments. Compulsory education was expanded to seven years after World War II, and women’s educational opportunities improved. However, as Patoon Siarat (Chapter 16) explains, schooling was largely conducted along the lines of a “one-size-fits-all” model and became increasingly irrelevant to individual and economic needs. The 1999 National Education Act attempted to encourage greater decentralization of management and to promote the idea that learning could take place not only in schools, but also in alternative venues such as homes, community bodies, and other social institutions.

EXPLANATORY FRAMEWORKS AND THE CONTINUED RELEVANCE OF CORE-PERIPHERY

How much is hegemony and how much is self-determination in East Asian education? Is center-periphery still relevant to the analysis of its education systems? (Amos et al., 2002). This is especially apparent in higher education with the quest for world-class universities by China, Korea, and Japan. East Asian higher education systems are closely tied to global markets and follow what sometimes appears to be a dependent pattern of adaptations driven by Western developed economies (Altbach, 1981, 1997, 2004; Altbach and Selvaratnam, 1989; Altbach and Umakoshi, 2004). Yet, there is also a significant amount of resistance. As East Asian countries adapt to ways that help embed economic globalization within their national landscape, the manner in which the adaptation occurs is more selective, open, and democratic than before. Moreover, while global communication with core (center) university systems has been more open and transparent, the system is closed to direct intervention from the outside, making hegemony a less plausible explanation for the manner in which the system is reacting within the new global environment of financial interdependency (Chapman and Austin, 2002).

One does not have to travel far in the region to hear calls to build world-class universities coming from vice-chancellors, ministries of education, and national leaders. Japan, South Korea, and China are particularly prominent in this respect (Min, 2003; Rosen, 2004; Park, 2005). These three countries’ national flagship universities are reaching for the gold standard, and the Southeast Asian university systems cannot escape the implications for their own development. As a block, East Asia may be pivotal to the global shift in the center-periphery equation. The region has some of the fastest growing economies in the world with certain linguistic attributes that set it apart.

While the discourse of center and periphery is still relevant to the analysis of university systems, the analytical frameworks from which it has arisen may or may not be. Theories of globalization have done little so far except to provide a thematic framework for the rapid and interdependent changes that increasingly characterize social life. Efforts to analyze the theoretical underpinnings of globalization inevitably return to the well of world-systems theory, neo-Marxism, and institutionalism, where there is also evidence of eclectically combined theoretical elements that derive from one or more of these. Although not theories of globalization, they address transnational structuring. Taken together, world-systems theory and neo-institutionalism help point us in the direction of an answer to the central question about East Asian education: How much is hegemony and how much is self-determination?
With China's rise from the status of a poor developing country to an economy which causes global reverberations, dependency theory seems less relevant than it did in the past. New circumstances and geopolitical realities give the impression that these perspectives are obsolete. While colonialism and dependency have shaped the past, the present appears to be less affected by them, though these ideologies still lurk in the background as shadows of the past and cautions for the future. China, Japan, and South Korea on their own, and the Southeast Asian countries united under the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), have become more emergent in the global knowledge production system and international economic power structure. While the global center has moved toward the United States since the collapse of the bipolar world, a discourse on empire has gained attention, with growing global criticism of foreign interventions and apprehension about what agencies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have done with global inequality.

What kinds of frameworks can be used to provide explanations of global processes in education, especially higher education, and to make them more congruent with what is actually happening, not only in Northeast Asia but also Southeast Asia, a geographical cluster of countries with smaller populations, diverse cultures, and more island-based and peninsular economies, and which have developed more slowly than their Northeast Asian neighbors? China’s own experience in the periphery has made it a flag bearer at times for developing countries, even though its own position in the center-periphery system has clearly changed. Meanwhile, Japan has worked to take on the role of a regional development agency and, by doing so, hopes to distance itself from its widely remembered historical aspirations from the first half of the previous century. South Korea has attained mass higher education faster than any country in the world. With the predominance of center-periphery approaches and their hegemony in discourse and policy, it is imperative to refocus on their explanatory value, especially in light of the changes in global development. Market liberalization has been epitomized in Asia as a contemporary form of civilization that it must catch up with in order to survive. Its switch from opponent to reluctant or willing supporter has had much to do with the end of the Cold War, continued pressure on regimes to deliver on domestic development promises, and the success in the 1980s of the four Asian Tigers (Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and South Korea). The enforcement of catch-up strategies in higher education enhances our understanding of the new international system, with burgeoning student populations, knowledge-economy discourse, reforms in governance, border-crossing academic programs, overseas study patterns, and new trade in educational services. Proper analysis of the international relations of higher education economies and human capital systems requires grounding in external realities that determine overarching domestic processes of state power and economic reproduction. In general, then, it appears that center-periphery explanations may lose some explanatory value, as part of the process of global transition.

Without a focus on social stratification and educational inequality within East Asian countries, new explanatory frameworks would be severely constrained (Kerckhoff, 2001; Meyer, 2001). New forms of growing inequalities on both domestic and international levels that are being reproduced through compulsory education and the massification of higher education remain the major challenge for any new framework of analysis. However, new economic power in Asia and its deepening global economic integration raise new questions.

There is an increasing need to come to terms with the resilience of poverty and how it finds its way into education in the form of a plurality of reasons for student dropout patterns: economic, informational, social, and cultural handicaps that hamper adjustment to modern learning environments. The major indicator of this phenomenon is its persistence beyond traditional domestic formats and places profit alongside education. However, the grossly abused privatization discourse does not necessarily entail a move beyond the center-periphery platforms associated with promises of national progress. This is actually part of an international process that pulls East Asian education back into a position that keeps center-periphery platforms relevant. In short, private education has the potential to be part of an exploitative relationship in which core nations are collaborators. Even while the discourse in Asia calls for rejection of selected Western value positions, it has been slower at developing newer analytical categories for schooling-state development experience.

Alternative strategies of development refer rival analytical categories which one can use to frame how the new wealth/elite classes in East Asian capitalist countries maintain state regimes. Thus, any new understanding of relations between states and markets in East Asian education can be realized only through the study of alternative strategies of market capitalist development (ASHL, 1998, Dumlao-Valino, 2001; Varghese, 2001). Studies of existing paradigms of dependency, neo-colonialism, and postmodernism are bound to be limiting in certain respects, especially when they focus on the structure of schooling as an incontrovertible and fundamental expression of the essence of national development.

There is a methodological imperative to approach the study of schooling as part of an historical process whose dynamics are internal to it. In the coming decades, East Asia will continue along the path of massification in basic, senior secondary, and tertiary education and its top universities will become more influential both within the national scene and as a symbol of their nations’ unique intellectual contribution to the global knowledge economy. In this sense, they are already pushing the limits of the center-periphery equation. But they are not there yet. Much could happen in the coming years to determine whether or not East Asian education will breach loose of the limits of center-periphery frameworks.
REFERENCES


CONTEXTS AND REFORMS IN EAST ASIAN EDUCATION

Li, Mei (2006) “Beyond push and pull factors: An economic and sociological analysis on mainland Chinese students’ outflow to Hong Kong and Macau for higher education,” Doctoral dissertation, University of Hong Kong.
GOING TO SCHOOL IN EAST ASIA


CONTEXTS AND REFORMS IN EAST ASIAN EDUCATION


