

# **Quenching the Thirst**

## **Meeting the Demand for Post-Secondary Education in Asia**

(Synopsis)

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1. There is an expanded demand for post-secondary education in Asia. This extends from the East Asian systems China, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong, South Asia system such as India, and other South East Asian systems such as Malaysia.
2. The expansion takes place mainly in the past few years:
  - In Mainland China, there were 50%, 25% and 15% expansions in 1999, 2000 and 2001 respectively<sup>1</sup>, in the first-year enrolment to tertiary education. This has resulted in a 200% increase in total enrolment in the past three years. The overall student body in tertiary education is around 15 million in the current academic year. It has to be borne in mind that the figures have masked huge disparity among regions. In large municipalities such as Shanghai and Beijing, over 75% of the age group are in tertiary education in one way or another.
  - In Singapore, where the enrolment ratio for tertiary education used to be only 15% before the 1990s, has expanded to 60%, with 20% in Type A and 40% in Type B tertiary education. There are also Technical Institutes that cross the secondary-tertiary border. The expansion continues.
  - Taiwan has seen an expansion of tertiary education in the past decade. There are around 150 institutions in a population of around 24 million. There is generally an oversupply of tertiary education.
  - In India, there is a rapid expansion of tertiary education. In Karnataka, for example, there is a demonstrated proliferation of all kinds of institutions of higher learning.
  - Hong Kong has formulated blueprint to expand tertiary education from 30% enrolment ratio (18% Type A) to 60% (maintaining 18% Type A) in 2010.
3. It is noticeable that most of the expansions are at the sub-degree levels.
  - In China, in sub-degree colleges and community colleges. Private colleges are allowed only to offer sub-degree programmes.
  - In Hong Kong, mainly in associate degrees and high diplomas.

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<sup>1</sup> News is that there will be a 5% decrease in 2002.

- In Singapore, mainly in the polytechnics.
  - In India, mainly in the second-tier affiliated colleges.
4. There are also many programmes in the region for the retraining of the unemployed in the 40s or 50s. However, there is seldom foreign participation in these programmes.
  5. The above does not include continuing education in the nonformal sector that takes place in the part-time mode.
    - In Mainland China, for example, there were, in 1999 alone, 1.3 million candidates for the Self-study Examination which confers formal qualification<sup>2</sup>. The number is on dramatic increase every year.
    - In Hong Kong, recent surveys point to around 22% of the working population who are engaged in systemic continuing education. Of these, around 70% are in programmes that lead to formal qualifications<sup>3</sup>.
  6. The new demand of post-secondary education is a reflection of the move of the societies into knowledge economy.
    - There is a general growth of the service sector in the economy, and there is a general decline in the percentage of “blue collars”.
    - Such a change is reflected in the large firms which, as contrary to the manufactory factories, require knowledge at the front-line.
    - There is a large percentage of small and medium enterprises which again constantly demand on-the-job, just-in-time, on-demand learning.
    - The outsourced services also demand a more adaptive workforce that is capable of learning.
    - There is therefore a renewed demand of learning opportunities that almost transcend all sectors and all strata.
  7. Almost with no exception, these systems all resort to non-government solutions for the new expansion of post-secondary education.
    - In Mainland China, since the early 1990s, there is a tendency to reduce government participation in tertiary education.
      - a. Measures include localisation of funding, joint-ventures between government and enterprises, private and non-government establishments, and joint-ventures from foreign investments.

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<sup>2</sup> Cheng, K.M. and Wong, K.H. (2002) “China’s education system at a glance up to 2001”. *China Education Forum* 3(1). 4.

<sup>3</sup> *The 2001 survey on the demand of continuing education in Hong Kong*. (2001) Hong Kong: School of Professional and Continuing Education.

- b. There are around 1,200 private institutions of tertiary education, although only around 40 are recognised by the Government. A new law is forthcoming to facilitate more private institutions.
  - c. A typical private tertiary institution offers three types of programmes: formal programmes within the state quota of students, semi-formal programmes with negotiated quota, and non-formal classes for self-study examination with unlimited quota.
  - d. At the moment, foreign investments in education are limited to international schools for children of expatriates.
  - e. There are, however, provisions for joint-ventures for local schools which cater for local students.
  - f. Foreign investments are not allowed for schools for local students.
- Hong Kong as an open market has, however, recently established a few control mechanisms for new ventures:
    - a. Legislation is under way to regulate non-university tertiary institutions that are not funded or totally funded by the Government. These include private institutions and others partly subsidised by the Government. Degree programmes are to be accredited by the relevant authority.
    - b. New community colleges emerged since 2000. They are offered largely by extensions of traditional universities. They enjoy the privilege of the brand and internal quality assurance mechanisms.
    - c. Continuing education, part-time, prospers mainly as extensions of traditional universities. Programmes include formal local degrees, joint-venture with overseas degrees and non-degree.
    - d. Hong Kong has recently established stipulation for non-local providers of tertiary learning opportunities. They can now offer programmes without partnership with local institutions.
  - In India, there are numerous second-tier colleges that are affiliated to traditional universities. They are largely private institutions that survive on the brand of the parent university. The latter receive financial benefits in return.
8. Many systems in the region begin or contemplate to begin systems near to voucher, or a system that moves away from institutional control of certification. This will give more opportunities for foreign participation in providing learning opportunities.

- South Korea has introduced since 1999 introduced the Credit-Bank System, where any learner who has accumulated 140 credits from any accredited institution will receive a qualification offer by the Government.
  - In Taiwan, there is a basic endorsement of the concept of a Lifelong Learning Passport, where any citizen could accumulate credit units to be certified by the Government.
  - At one point, Singapore was contemplating the concept of Lifelong Learning Card, which is a smart card that carries not only the records of credit units, but also fixed-sum government subsidy to be used at the discretion of the learner.
  - In Hong Kong, there is a new system where government subsidy is provided to individuals who pursue sub-degree or associate degree under four circumstances: local programmes, overseas programmes in selected areas, programmes provided locally by non-local institutions, and joint-venture programmes between local and overseas institutions.
9. Having said all these, the region has been known for its substantial number of students studying overseas. Malaysia used to be the largest sender of overseas students, and is only in the recent decade taken over by China. Taiwan and Hong Kong have also been large senders of overseas students. Such students (a) are largely there with their private money, and go abroad at an increasingly younger age.
10. In this context, there are wide-open opportunities for foreign participation in the provision of learning opportunities.
- In this part of the world, such opportunities enjoy the general enthusiasm for further study.
    - a. In Mainland China, survey estimates that parents are prepared to spend 30% of the savings on children's higher learning<sup>4</sup>.
    - b. In Hong Kong, study shows that the estimated expenditure on continuing education in 2002-2002 is around USD1.25 billion, which is around USD1,200 per person.
  - Such opportunities are economically beneficial for the hosting systems.
    - a. In systems where there are few institutions, the start-up cost is high in order to establish new institutions.
    - b. Most of the new ventures in expansion of tertiary education are in the private sector and hence do not incur new costs for public purse.

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<sup>4</sup> Among others, this was the reason why China dramatically expanded higher education since 1999.

- There are, however, concerns that such opportunities would hinder development of local higher education.
  - There are also concerns that such opportunities would create a kind of cultural hegemony and would jeopardise the cultural identity of the learners.
11. Apart from learning opportunities, there are also other types of educational services that Singapore and Hong Kong “purchase” from other countries.
- Both systems are often generous in appointing overseas academics to visit local institutions, with very handsome honorariums.
  - Both systems very often appoint overseas academics and professionals to conduct consultancy projects in education that inform government policy-making or institutional development. These often take the form of overseas visiting panels, policy advisory visits or external examinations of student work.