

## BOOK REVIEW

A Review of *Higher Education in the 21st Century:  
Global Challenge and National Response*

Philip G. Altbach and Patti McGill Peterson (Editors)  
New York: Institute of International Education, 2015.  
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This book is an outcome of the symposium titled *Global Challenge and National Response*, held in December 1998, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation. It was convened by Dr. Patti McGill Peterson, the then Executive Director of the Council on International Exchange of Scholars (CIES), which is affiliated to the Institute of International Education (IIE), New York. The papers presented at the symposium appeared in this book form after a gap of 17 years. This edited book on higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century consists of nine essays. It emphasises the challenges of affording higher education due to mounting numbers of students around the globe.

In the chapter *Global Challenge and National Response: Notes for an International Dialogue on Higher Education*, Philip and Davis opine that higher education has profoundly changed. The involved stakeholders in the academic enterprise should have come with current modifications and changes. It is observed that there is enrolment dilemma in higher educational institutes in many countries due to the increase of number of students. This concern must lead to the international dialogue on how to cope with the issue. Such a dialogue can foster the higher educational institutes with a global perspective through various ideas from experts, academia, researchers, etc., and even through collaborative research works. Moreover, policy makers, public administrators, and other stake holders should be linked for their opinions on the contemporary challenges of higher education. We live in a modern world

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where higher educational system is valued globally. The structures of the educational system are shifting from elite to mass through global accessibility. It demands that the policy makers and beneficiaries of the higher education system must devise ways and means to offset the cost of education in view of the public good in the long run.

Min Weifang, the author of *Global Challenges and the Chinese Response*, discloses that the system of higher education in China has a long tradition dating back to three thousand years. It was called *Taixue*, meaning ‘highest institution of learning.’ Nevertheless, the modern system of Chinese higher education is the result of learning from interaction with the West. Just as the world goes through a seismic shift in higher educational scenario, Chinese higher education too is facing several challenges. The overspecialized and departmentalized higher education was backed by the logic that it was vital to change the rigid central planning system of governance and administration. This is an incredible task, covering a series of reforms, which consist of breaking the departmental boundaries between different government agencies that segmented the higher education system. This entails reorientation and revision of the government policy towards higher educational institutes about their status of getting more autonomy. The rapid growth of economy and the advancement of science and technology have resulted in the increase of individual income and higher standard of living, which has also increased the push for higher educational opportunities. Thus, the Chinese system in higher education has expanded very quickly since the last few decades, with its own newer challenges.

The importance of international dialogue on higher education is discussed in the chapter, *The Transformation of an Imperial Colony into an Advanced Nation: India in Comparative Perspective* by Suma Chitnis. She calls for an inter-country sharing of experience and knowledge in the field of higher education. In India, modern education system was initiated by the British in 1857, with the purpose of introducing the Indian elite into their (broadly European) culture. This was also a kind of agenda to colonize the country culturally, by forming a cadre of educated Indians to serve the British government in different areas such as law, medicine, education, and military. The exchange and sharing of knowledge with other countries may bring the hub of educated manpower (youth) through transnational competitions and partnerships.

This development may find a way to link the importance of higher education in being an advanced nation.

In *Higher Education in Africa: Challenges and Strategies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, George S. Eshiwani discusses the challenges and strategies of the higher educational system that are facing most of the African countries. Most of the emerging African universities were modelled after British or French (or European) universities. University was viewed as a vehicle for training high-level manpower (educated youth) for the new nations. It was a search for universal knowledge to respond to the real problems, needs, and aspirations of these new nations. The universities in Africa are seen as the driving force behind economic development through the rapid expansion in student enrolment regardless of declining financial provisions. Similarly, the number of professional faculties and departments in all universities is also increasing accordingly. Furthermore, the demand of African students to pursue higher education abroad mainly in the UK, the US, and India is increasing. This expansion in enrolment has enabled university education to shift from the elite to the masses, making African universities more accessible. However, it is unfortunate that women have not benefited proportionately from the dramatic expansion of higher education and the challenge lies in ensuring the participation of women in higher education both as students and professionals.

Nasima Buddha in *South Africa: Future Prospects* highlights the major transformation in higher educational system of South Africa after a new Higher Education Act was promulgated in 1997. This Act was set in motion with the termination of the apartheid system. Overhaul of the higher education system was needed to amend the past inequalities and develop a common platform for the needs of everyone in the society. This is to be achieved in the midst of fiscal austerity and a funding environment that places greater emphasis on accountability for the expenditure of public funds, market principles, and effectiveness. The funding of higher education is also based on sharing of costs between private beneficiaries and the State. There are some private higher educational institutes in South Africa offering programs largely through franchise agreements with local and international universities. Still, these programs are largely limited to the fields such as business administration and communication and information technology.

Simon Schwartzman in his article *Latin America: National Responses to World Challenges in Higher Education* observes that many higher educational institutes appeared in Latin America in 1960s, but not as purposeful projects of governments and university administrators. They emerged primarily due to the large scale socio-economic and cultural changes. There is a long tradition of student politics in Latin America and an indifferent attitude of universities towards scientific scholarship and technical expertise. The new public higher educational institutions focus on training lawyers, engineers, military officers, and medical doctors. There are challenges regarding the financing and institutional reforms in the field of higher education. One of the major reasons for the slow pace of development in higher educational sector is the political interference and lack of good will. However, the higher educational institutes in Latin America have become aware of the need for bold reforms and are working towards renewal of the sector.

Akimasa Mitsuta's essay on *Universal Problems and National Realities: Japan in Comparative Perspective* points out that academic institutions have common curricular elements and a common language of instruction with a view to responding to global interests. Japan still resists the internationalization of English and the compulsion to give it a central place in education. The most crucial issue for Japan is internationalization of higher education. It is a concern for Japan that if the international universities are inclined to promote education and research with English as the medium, would Japanese institutions of higher education attract scholars from other countries?

In his chapter, *Current Issues and Future Priorities for European Higher Education Systems*, Barbara Spornout lines the major current issues of higher education in the selected countries of Europe. She also presents future priorities from organizational viewpoint. The colleges and universities in Europe are confronted with three major challenges: expansion, diversification, and massification. The expansion refers to the large increases in student numbers in most European countries in response to the public policies providing education to a large portion of the population under the banner 'education for all.' The issue of funding in higher education has always been a major trigger for restructuring a better system of higher education in Europe as well. However, funding strategies in higher education have changed. Internationalization of higher education is a major focus as well, as it involves the imperative for equal access and diversity in European institutions.

Peter Darvas narrates a number of global issues comprising privatization, access, equity, and accountability in the chapter titled *A Regional Perspective: Central and Eastern Europe*. He observes that the transformation of higher education was achieved within a relatively short period, and this has been closely attached with broader socio-economic changes in Europe. The public and the politicians have given greater focus to the higher educational system in the last decade. A well-articulated strategic plan for higher education could lead to the creation of well-trained man power, which would fulfil the needs of emerging industries and services. The increasing demand for higher education can be realized through initiating new and innovative programs (including country-based innovation), international assistance, and program development. All of these interrelated issues represent various aspects of a systemic change in higher education in which new stakeholders emerge and old ones undergo a radical change.

What can India learn from these developments and challenges in the international scenario? In India, the system of higher education has a gorgeous legacy which began several millennia ago with such renowned ancient universities such as Taxila (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE; located in modern-day Punjab in Pakistan) and Nalanda (5<sup>th</sup> century BCE; in modern-day Bihar). However, Indian universities are still struggling to grab a place amongst the top 100 or top 200 universities in the world. At present, Indian higher education is gravely affected by political interference, ideologies, excessive supply of money without accountability, inadequate and insufficient investment in human resource and infrastructure. Never the less, we can still hope that India will be one of the leading educational hubs in the near future as the higher education sector has witnessed a rapid growth and diversification through increase in the number of universities, introduction of measures for greater transparency and accountability, institutionalization of quality assurance and accreditation processes, etc. The enrolment of students in higher education in India is also the world's third largest, next to China and the United States. According to the report *Higher Education in India: Vision 2030*, India aims to be not just the best higher educational hub in the world, but the best *for* the world, delivering social, economic, and intellectual values par excellence. To materialize the dreams and goals envisioned for 2030, a transformative and innovative approach would be necessary at all levels of higher education:

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starting from curricula and pedagogy to the use of technology to partnerships, governance, and funding. The analysis and insights offered by this excellent book *Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* will be a great help for the stakeholders in Indian higher education as they plan ahead with the Vision 2030 in mind.