Internationalising the 'plural society': Alternative transnational higher education in Malaysia

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Theme

- Internationalisation of HE that is not about…
  - International student mobility from Global South to Global North
  - the expansion of English-language programmes by emulating leading Western universities or adopting their programs

- Alternative models of university internationalisation suited to specific post-colonial national and regional contexts.

Diverse and broad implications of university internationalisation in Asia: A case study from Malaysia

- Internationalisation of the "plural society" (Furnivall, 1948)
  - Post-colonial plural society under globalisation
  - 'Inherently unstable': challenge of social stability and integration
  - From 'baggage' to 'leverage': international outreach, a contemporary quest for diversity and multiculturalism

- Localisation of internationalisation
  - 3 international universities with ties to local ethnic communities
  - Internationalisation of local ethnic communities

  "Second choice," small-time, substandard TNE alternative?

Malaysia:
A post-colonial modern nation-state emerged from the 'plural society' context

- Plural society: The medley of peoples—Europeans, Chinese, Indian and native— mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, it own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. (Furnivall, 1948)

- Different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit. (ibid.)

- Existence of large-scale migrant communities from different civilizations, such as the Chinese and Indian laborers migrated to the Malay world under colonial rule. (Shamsul 2005)

- Affirmative action policies that favors "bumiputra" or Malay-Malaysians in education, public sector employment and government contracts. HE access politicized along ethnic lines (Sidhu & Christie 2015)

HE landscape in Malaysia and changes since the 1990s

- Expansion of private HE
  - Access improved for non-Bumiputra students
  - Still restricted in prestigious programs in public universities for non-bumiputras (Lee, Sirat & Wan, 2017)

- Becoming a "regional education hub" (Knight & Sirat 2011)
  - A major host country of IBCs
  - Educity in Iskandar Malaysia "Asia's first multi-campus education city"

- From 'sending' country to 'host' country of international students
 - Goal of hosting 250,000 by 2025 (from approx. 30,000 in 2003)

Malaysia: a strategic international HE locality

- Political stability and economic development
- Government support for international education
- Education needs and demographic growth of the surrounding areas/regions

- Unity slogans: Communal to "Malaysian" national identity
- Ethnic diversity and religious tolerance (Nagra 2005)
- A modern, pluralist Muslim-majority country w/ a mix of secular and religious (Graf 2016)
- Geographical proximity and socio-cultural ties to China and India
  - Chinese and Indian Malaysians cultural resources to strengthen commercial engagements with India and China (Sidhu & Christie 2015)
  - Diaspora roles in HE (Bamberger, Kim Morris & Rizvi 2021)

3 institutions

1. International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), English- (Arabic) medium national university

2. Xiamen University Malaysia (XMUM) , the first overseas branch of a leading Chinese university

3. Manipal University College Malaysia (MUCM), a medical university college operated by a global higher education group headquartered in India
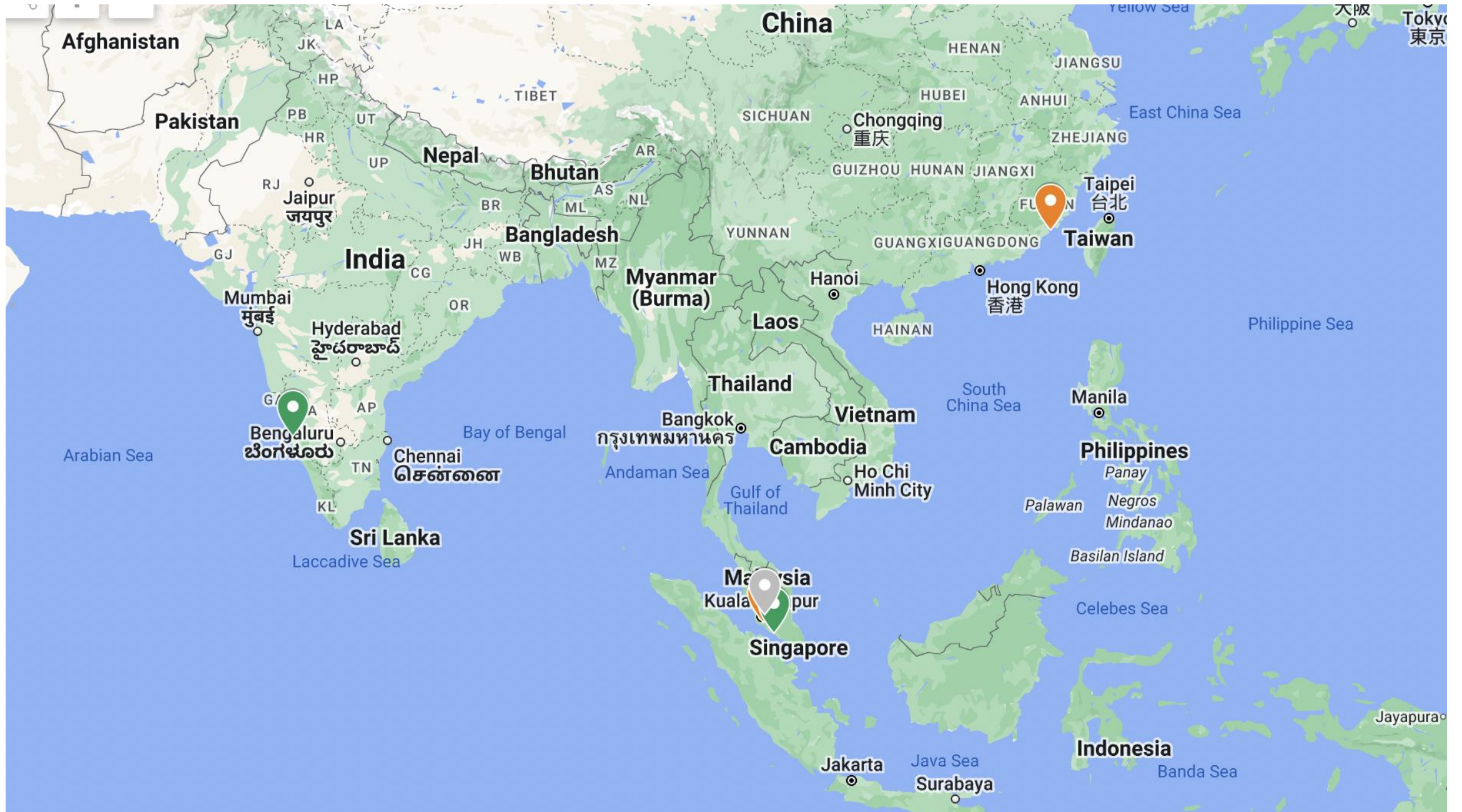
International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)

- **Globally relevant, Islamic education in English**

- National university established in 1983 (1965 as a private institution)

- Viable alternative to internationally mobile Muslim students (Graf 2016: 8)

- Islamisation & Internationalisation mission: "Muslim world's theory of knowledge to the world" and "Islamic university's relevance to the world"

- OIC and OIC member countries' contribution and representation in governance

- 100,000 alumni from 125 countries (as of 2020

- International student body global rather than regional.

- "Communiversity" aspiration and seeking alternative to Western models and rankings

- Emerging rivals, domestic and international
    e.g. Indonesian International Islamic University (IIIU) in 2021

Xiamen University Malaysia (XMUM)

- **"Integration of China's elements with international education through teaching in English"**

- Opening Feb 2016

- Historical legacy: Xiamen University established by a Singaporean Chinese, Tan Kah Kee; longstanding relationship with overseas Chinese business communities in SE Asia (He & Wilkins, 2019: 329)

- Appr. 6300 students (Spr. 2023): 56% local, 36% PRC, others from 35 countries

- 500 top-level mainland students admitted each year from main campus (Jie 2018)

- Main campus students seeking international experiences and pursuing disciplines of their choice

- 2 certificates + 2 transcripts (English & Chinese, recognized by MoE in both countries)

- Mission to nurture "fine citizens of the region" who will contribute to "the people and social progress of Malaysia, China, and Southeast Asia"

- Malaysian graduates now seeking postgraduate studies in China.

- Faculty: Malaysian and international rather than home-based.

Manipal University College Malaysia (MUCM)

- Affordable, high quality and international medical education

- Established in 1997 as Melaka-Manipal Medical College (MMMC), becoming a University College in 2021

- "Single largest contributor of doctors to the Malaysian healthcare systems" (univ web):over 10,000 Manipal graduates contributing to the Malaysian healthcare sector.

- Part of Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE), managed by a global education group, operating campuses in India, Malaysia, Antigua and Dubai.

- The group known for "effectively leveraging its brand equity and experience for international expansion" (Agarwal 2010) with 2/3 of its revenue coming from international operations (Ohara, 2017)

- Diversification of student body through overseas campus operations as international student quotas in India remain limited.

- Hailed as the "first Indo-Malaysian medical (professional) collaboration in higher education" building on a long-standing partnership in bilateral medical education.

- Potential reversal of older student flows?

Opportunities

- High-level endorsement from the Malaysian government (and counterparts)

- Leverage support and enrollment from ethnic & religious communities at home and beyond, existing academic ties, or historical legacy;

- Long-standing desire for quality HE from communal stakeholders

- English-medium > multilingualism (Arabic, Chinese)

- Accepted use of English, as a dominant medium of instruction
  - Colonial language → language of global business, science and communication

<u>Plural society in the new context has a potential to offer opportunities for integration with global society.</u>

Further inquiries

- "Indigenization" to internationalization?
  - "Indigenization" of Western HE models in Malaysia (Lee, Wan & Sirat 2017)
    State coordination, national language, ethnic quotas etc.
  - Old to "new pluralism"?
    - International Muslims/international Chinese/international Indians
    - Integration and stratification challenges?

- Finding a niche in the global hegemonic construction of knowledge
  - The "world-class" indicators used in global university rankings favor Anglo-American universities.
  - The criteria irrelevant to efforts to improve the quality of universities in developing and emerging economies. Rather, the narrow "world class" image renders them inferior and "backward" (Ohara 2017).