As Euro-American domination weakens:

East Asian higher education in the multipolar world

International Symposium on ‘Reexamining internationalization, Endogenization, and Regionalization of Higher Education in Asia-Pacific Region: An East-West Dialogue’

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**[title slide]**

Thank you to Jing Liu and to the Graduate School of Education at Tohoku University for the invitation. It is a pleasure to share the Symposium with Yang Rui and Yonezawa Akiyoshi, leading scholars of world higher education studies, from whom we have all learned much.

**[The world is always emerging and changing]**

Everything is always changing. We cannot know the future, though we can prepare ourselves for the future. Comparing the Chinese and Western traditions, David Hall and Roger Ames argue that the early Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who focused on process not stasis, being not becoming, and used metaphor and allusion, comes close to Chinese thought, and also intersects with Basho in Japan. But if ‘everything is always changing’ the uncertainty is greater at certain times. This is such a time. Higher education is swept up in the uncertainty.

**[East Asian higher education in the multipolar world]**

Today I will reflect on the time, the global context, before moving to East Asia. After positionality I discuss drivers of the present uncertainty and destabilisation: the climate-nature emergency, the trajectory of globalisation, muti-polarity in general and in education and science, and the weakening of Western domination. I will also argue that higher education is travelling better in East Asia than in most of the world, despite the antinomy of Westernisation and indigenisation, and the absence of political regionalisation.

**[Positionality - bridge]**

This symposium is billed as an East-West dialogue. I am a Westerner whose career-long responsibility has been to critique the mainstream of his own tradition. I am a social democrat. I am committed to individual freedom, democracy and open expression in the public sphere while rejecting Western capitalism, self-centeredness, governance by military force and claims to cultural superiority. I do not share the typical Anglophone anti-statism. The state is essential to social coordination to achieve the common good. I am not a nationalist nor am I pro-Western. There is much to be learned from different cultures, and we sorely need a global authority. I am always curious about East Asian civilisation. I think the larger solutions to our global problems will lie in hybridisations of East and West.

**[Higher education and modernisation]**

But our topic is higher education. Since the Western Zhou dynasty higher education has always been a process of the cultural formation of persons in structured knowledge. It prepares people as thinking agents while inculcating social values and behaviours, through scholarship, techniques and specialised languages. The innovation of the German university was to enrich the knowledge element, making it collectively reflexive, by positioning the formative curriculum alongside research inquiry. The common denominator in all higher education, still, whether the programme is specifically vocational or not, is not economic value but culture, knowledge. Remarkably, this old way of socialising persons as autonomous agents soaked in structured knowledge is now joined to a great range of social purpose, and has become pivotal to individual lives and the modernisation of societies across the world.

The worldwide Gross Tertiary Enrolment ratio has jumped from 19% in 2000 to 42% in 2022, and 59 per cent in Asia-Pacific. Published papers in global science, nearly all in English, have increased from 1.1 million in 2000 to 2.9 million in 2020. Higher education not only fills the professions and occupations; it elevates shared literacy, technological competence and vocational skills; it provides opportunities and assigns populations to unequal pathways; it generates knowledge for industry, the workplace, government, health services, education itself and public culture; it builds cities, regions and cross-border relations. Higher education also plays a key role in international relations and the cooperative global science system. Until recently, ‘internationalisation’ in higher education was widely seen as always good and the main means of lifting quality, even though it often also meant Americanisation.

But the ancient process of cultural formation in formal knowledge may not be the best way to carry out all of these functions, and the values at the base of the enterprise are unclear. Higher education policy is often colonised by neo-liberalism, in which the sole objective of students is economic self-interest, and the sole objective of universities is corporate self-interest and not the common good. If cultural formation is seen as irrelevant, despite its central role in learning, and the real purpose is customer satisfaction in the production of graduate employment, though higher education does not jobs, what is higher education’s contribution to whole persons, moral order and global sustainability? Neoliberal higher education is ungrounded and vulnerable, and more so in the present unstable setting.

What drives this instability? A mix of elements, which are affecting different countries and destabilising international collaboration in varying ways: the climate-nature emergency, populism and nativism in politics, the pluralisation of global power, the part breakdown of the post-1990 Pax Americana, geo-political conflict. Let’s look at these elements.

**[Global September temperature 0.5C above previous record]**

Hanging over all is the climate-nature emergency. It is clear to almost everyone that this is a universal crisis, an existential crisis, the greatest challenge that has ever faced humanity.

**[West Antarctic ice melt will raise global sea levels 3-5 metres by 2100]**

For example, the latest reports state that the melting of the West Antarctic ice sheet is now locked in, regardless of what happens with greenhouse gas emissions. That is, the melting cannot be stopped. It will be completed by 2100, just 77 years away, and will raise global sea levels by 3 to 5 metres. This will take out all or much of Cairo, Lagos, Maputo, Copenhagen, London, Buenos Aires, Los Angeles, New York, Mumbai, Dhaka, Bangkok, Jakarta, Shanghai and Yokohama. Tokyo is more vulnerable than Kyoto which is 55 metres above sea level. The climate-nature emergency is fostering deep and growing anxiety everywhere. It corrodes faith in government and coordinated action, especially in countries where fossil fuel companies and/or agribusiness exercise decisive political influence and it seems impossible to change policy. The climate nature emergency is also undermining faith in multilateral forums and agencies because they are suborned by big capital and national self-interest. Global authority is essential to meet the challenge but global authority is an empty space. So we have the debilitating situation where scientists cooperate worldwide, and are very vocal, but their truth telling is undermined by economic interests and ignored by the states they control. This weakens truth telling and isolates science and the universities that generate it.

**[Destabilised states, populism and intensified nationalism]**

At the same time, in many though not all countries in the West and parts of the global South, states and politics are being destabilised by nativism and tribalism, great hostility to difference and to migration, fiercer ideological polarisation, fractious social media debate and repression of independent media. Nativist parties have leading roles in India, Hungary, Italy, France, Austria, Netherlands, Sweden and part of Germany. They control the state only in India, Hungary and italy, but Trump may win the U.S. in 2024. The climate-nature emergency, and associated anxiety, the sense of lost future and the futility of politics, neo-liberal selfishness and the gap in moral order, all feed this. It direct affects higher education. Conflicts over people mobility affect incoming students in Denmark, the Netherlands and UK and have long dogged U.S. higher education. Nativist parties are hostile to cosmopolitan mixing and foreign ties in universities and often oppose equity and inclusion policies. Some are sceptical about science. The culture wars are undermining universities in the U.S.

**[Intensified geo-political conflict]**

The combination of destabilised states and intensified national self-interest is dangerous. It fosters a zero-sum geo-politics in which only some can win. Intensified nationalism shows itself in security politics and militarism, evident in growth of defence spending and spread of war from Africa and West Asia to Europe. Russia’s invasion has destroyed or damaged part of Ukraine’s higher education and taken Russian universities out of academic freedom and cross-border relations. The U.S. having failed to convert China to the American political system, has reversed almost forty years of positive engagement and is pursuing economic, scientific and technological decoupling. The military temperature is rising. The number of collaborative China-U.S. science papers is falling, U.S. visas for Chinese doctoral students are restricted, and Chinese student entry to UK has slowed. Western governments and universities now define scientific collaboration with China as risk rather than as opportunity. The fact of different political systems is now defined as an obstacle to knowledge exchange.

**[Globalisation as Americanisation]**

To understand what has happened we can start with the recent history of globalisation, by which I mean worldwide convergence and integration in general and in higher education.

Globalisation advanced by leaps and bounds from the 1980s onwards, economically through the cross-border trade, foreign investment, off-shoring and supply chains, and in networked global communications after the birth of the Internet in 1989. This coincided with the global highpoint of U.S. political domination after Soviet Union collapsed. Global integration took the form of cultural Americanisation and this patterned higher education and science across the world through the 1990s and 2000s, at the cost of non-English language knowledge. It demanded conformity with Anglophone models and problematised all other forms as inferior and backward. It was a form of imperialism. However, the control exercised by the imperial centre was less complete than in the older form of Western imperialism that was based on military conquest, religious conversion, slavery and direct exploitation. This is because the recent globalisation played out in a world of independent states. Crucially, the diversified nodes of the global network could exercise their own agency to some degree.

**[Multi-polarity and American rejection of globalisation]**

As Manuel Castells has shown, networked relations in the economy and knowledge foster horizontal relations as well as vertical relations, dispersal as well as concentration. The fact of political autonomy allowed a growing number of countries to use globalisation to build national capacity in the economy and in higher education and science, moving from neo-coloniality to post-coloniality. The change has been uneven, incomplete and contradictory but globalisation has fostered a more multi-polar world in which Euro-American domination has weakened, China has great weight and a layer of middle powers has emerged – not just Japan and Russia but South Korea, India, Iran, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa and others.

This multi-polarity has been a major outcome of globalisation. It is as important as Americanisation has been, and in geo-politics, has worked against global Americanisation. Globalisation in the 1990s was Americanisation, unequivocally. It is now less so, there is a growing potential for other global projects, other kinds of global convergence. Meanwhile the U.S. has withdrawn from its commitment to all-round globalisation and is now selective.s

**[Growth of science papers in Scopus by country 1996-2020]**

The graph shows the growth in science paper output in China (in red) and India, and in the rest of the world category, including the other Asia, and Latin America. And that is just the work in English. Real global plurality is much greater when we include work in STEM and the other disciplines in Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Japanese and other languages.

**[Longer established and slower growing science systems 2000-2020]**

This chart shows those national science systems where the growth of output between the year 2000 and 2020 was less than the world average rate of 5.15% a year. These are nearly all mature science systems, established prior to the year 2000.

**[Recently emerged and faster growing science systems 2000-2020]**

Now this chart shows the fast growing national science systems, mostly established in the last three decades. Some fall on the left of the dotted line that indicates world average per capita income. Science has spread to middle-income and some low-income countries. It is no longer an oligopoly of the Anglophone world, Europe, Japan, Israel and Russia. There are major emerging systems in India, now third largest after China and the US, Iran, South Korea, Brazil, Turkey, and Indonesia, growing at a remarkable 25% a year.

**[Top universities in STEM research, Leiden ranking]**

So far these data have been about quantity, the volume of science papers. What about the high citation papers? The STEM disciplines are no longer dominated by the US, as they were ten years ago. China has the top eight universities in physical sciences and engineering, and the top nine in maths and computing. Singapore also does well. The measure is size driven - it give us the quantity of quality, science firepower if you like. It favours large universities such as Shanghai Jiao Tong or Zhejiang. But many US universities are also very large. These data show that full scientific decoupling between China and the West is an unrealistic goal.

**[Top universities in other science fields]**

It is different in biomedicine and health sciences where the leading 14 universities are all Anglophone and the top Chinese university is Shanghai Jiao Tong at 18. In the final conglomerate table, life and earth sciences, the outcome is mixed in geo-political terms.

As I have noted, there is a lag in the decolonisation of science and to a degree, universities. It is still an English language knowledge world. Only China and Singapore have joined the lead Anglophone universities. Sooner or later, however, East Asian, the rising middle powers, and parts of the global South, will secure greater global authority on their own terms.

**[Push-back against global diversification]**

It has to come, but it will be a struggle. The global spread of capacity in higher education and science, including the rise of China, ought to be welcome everywhere but is not. The part breakdown of Pax Americana amid global pluralisation has fed the insecurity of Western states and powered zero-sum geo-politics. It is hard for hegemonic powers to let go or even reduce their self image. Yet the U.S. retains full domination only in the military sphere. It has lost it in the economy and STEM science. Its decoupling strategy, designed to slow China’s evolution, is too late to be fully effective, nor can it contain the rising middle powers. Meanwhile, in a role reversal, the U.S., with its open domestic political system, positions itself as against global integration, while the party-state in China champions open global engagement. The West is also positioned on the defensive by the worldwide momentum for decolonisation. It is difficult for former colonising countries to fully embrace decolonisation.

**[Is a global moral order possible, in general and in higher education?]**

The leading countries in the Anglophone West now lack a normative global project, in general and in higher education. The climate-nature emergency has been generated by the Western model of development, based on capital accumulation, in which freedom is grounded in private economic freedom not the collective good. This puts both ecological solutions and global equalisation out of reach. Further, global economic liberalism is no longer supported in the U.S. What then is the basis for a future global moral order?

Higher education could be one of the building blocks of that moral order. But if so university autonomy and academic freedom need to be re-grounded, to underpin both civil public conversation and global cooperation, and advance truth telling in science. Here there are limits to what higher education can do unaided. Everywhere the sector is embedded in states. To what extent can nationally-based higher education foster a collaborative global moral order? And to what extent can higher education be re-grounded without re-grounding the state itself separately from big capital *and* populism, and changing the confrontational geo-politics? In the Anglophone world, a complete rethink is needed, but there is no sign of that happening yet. The state is in healthier shape in East Asia than in much of in the West.

**[East Asia: Economy, demography, education, science]**

Arguably, East Asia could become the strongest region in the world for higher education and science, for several reasons. First, the size, economic resources and science capacity of the region. China and Japan are larger in population and GDP than any European nation. Almost 30 per cent of world GDP is in East Asia. There were 870,292 science papers from East Asia and Singapore in 2020, compared to 870,292 in Europe and 541,779 in North America.

**[Factors that suggest East Asia could become the world’s strongest region in higher education and science]**

Second, the East Asian state. In contrast to most countries and regions, the East Asian state is typically consistent, constructive and long term in higher education. This state tradition rests on the central role of education in East Asian civilisations. My 2011 paper on the ‘Confucian model of higher education’, later renamed the ‘Post-Confucian model’, refers not to a distinct model of *university* but to a distinctive model of higher education *system*, in which accelerated state investment in research is joined to shared public/private funding of education and governance via reflexive policy targets. At different times this model has built successful systems in all of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, the two SARs and China PRC. It has yet to be applied in Vietnam and Mongolia. The post-Confucian model stands out not just for the level of investment, but for the intelligence and coherence of policy.

**[Educational platform for higher education in East Asia: PISA 2022 maths, science and reading at age 15]**

Third, the educational quality of the student population. Confucian self-cultivation in the home, and East Asian schooling, shape a matchless level of student achievement. In PISA the world’s top 6 systems in mathematics are all in East Asia, Japan is a notable achiever in PISA. This is a tremendous educational platform for first degree education and vocational training.

**[Factors that suggest East Asia could become the world’s strongest region in higher education and science]**

Fourth, higher education in East Asia is essentially bi-linguistic and bi-cultural and has the potential to creatively hybridise indigenous tradition with Western approaches – though up to now indigenous potentials have been largely crowded out by Western and especially American epistemic frameworks and models of institutions and student and faculty life.

This is unfortunate because traditional Sinic thought might offer solutions to certain of the problems in Anglophone society and educational practice that I discussed earlier: the need for positive models of social collectivity and higher education’s role in creating collective as well as individual benefits; the fostering of harmony with nature rather than suborning nature; and the role of higher education in developing and reproducing the moral order, whereby states and individuals each take responsibility for the common good.

**[*Tianxia* as an voluntary inclusive global order based on unity in diversity]**

Chinese tradition also provides ideas for global relations in higher education. This could enable East Asia to lead. Arguably, global relations should be grounded not in hegemonic rankings but in mutual respect and unity in diversity, *he er butong*. *Tianxia*, in the world-centred version of Zhang Tingyang, is one possibility. *Tianxia* means an inclusive global order without an outer boundary, with non-coercive systems based on voluntary consent. It intersects with the de Sousa Santos ‘ecology of knowledges’ approach to multiple cultures.

East Asian countries have indigenous cultural resources but less cultural agency in higher education and science. So how to move beyond Western templates, draw more effectively on indigenous ideas, and play a larger role in shaping world higher education? It is not for me to say what your tradition means to you, but I see three preliminary conditions. First, abandon strategies based on catch-up as imitation. In different ways Japan, South Korea and China have now caught up to the West, and the catch-up mentality restricts indigenous innovation. Second, break with the QS and Times Higher rankings and mount a concerted critique. These rankings are not just flawed in methodology and validity but manipulate the global order to secure Western control. Third, pressure publishing and bibliometrics to create a multi-lingual regime in global science. This will happen when publishers adjust their business model to publish in multiple languages –they can do this, the software is already there - and non-English work enters the global conversation via translation into English.

**[Factors necessary to achieve political regionalisation]**

The indigenous character and global impact of East Asian higher education and knowledge would also be advanced if a viable region was established, as in Europe or ASEAN. Again, it is not for me to say what you can do, but at the level of government the political will is lacking. There are deep differences in history, in political systems and in geo-political positioning. Also, China is too large to allow a balanced region as in Europe. Nevertheless, to the extent that the higher education systems can collaborate on common global problems such as the Western bias in rankings and science publishing, all regional actors can be advanced.

**[Sign off slide]**

Thank you very much for listening. < Go chōshu arigatōgozaimashita > I look forward to Rui.