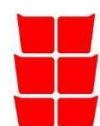# Cross Border Higher Education in ASEAN: Structures, Policies, Development and Integration

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Abstract

This paper seeks to understand how cross border higher education is structured in ASEAN. It also asks how policies on cross border higher education have impacted development and social integration in the region. The first part of this paper assesses joint initiatives by ASEAN to co-operate in cross border education. The second part of this paper analyses how higher education is structured in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. It examines the strategies that the three countries have relied on, to promote cross border education. It also investigates the experiences of ASEAN citizens who have undertaken cross border education in these three countries. The third part of this paper evaluates ASEAN's regional policy on cross border education, and analyses findings from Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. The fourth and final part of this paper assesses how cross border education has impacted development and social integration in the region. It makes policy recommendations as to how cross border education policy can be refined, to facilitate development and social integration.

Biography

Wei Ling Diane Lek is a PhD candidate in Political Science at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Her research interests include welfare theory, development policy and comparative Asian politics. She holds an MA in Politics from Columbia University, New York, and a BA in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) from Oxford University.

Cross border education: A terminology

Cross border education refers to the movement of people and research across national boundaries for academic purposes. Individuals undertake a variety of cross border education. They may spend a semester or years abroad. They could pursue a degree, undertake an internship or consulting work, participate in collaborative academic projects, or conduct fieldwork research. The sources of funding for cross border education also vary. The state, participating institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may provide scholarships and grants. Individuals can also self-finance.[1]

The OECD notes that other terms may be used in exchange for 'cross border education'. These include transnational, offshore, distance and overseas education. For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen the term 'cross border education' as it highlights the complex role that jurisdictional boundaries play. The large part of policymaking on cross border education is conducted within jurisdictional boundaries. A state for example, often decides on the number of educational institutions it will operate, and the number of student visas it will issue, independent of foreign influence. While such policy decisions are made domestically, they have the potential to impact the socioeconomic conditions of other states. Granted the multi-national impact of cross border education, states increasingly see value in co-ordinating policy across national boundaries.

Research approach

In my research, I sought to build a corpus of data on the policies and the dominant discourses that influence cross border education in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Apart from consulting policy documents, newspaper articles and secondary literature, I gathered pictorial and textual data produced on social media such as Facebook, blogs and online forums.[2] The constructed corpus will help us better understand each country's stand on cross border education within ASEAN.

As part of my research, I also visited Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, to conduct in-depth interviews with two groups of individuals: 1) foreign ASEAN students and academics undertaking cross border education and 2) personnel from the international relations offices of universities. For the first group of individuals, I sought to gather information on:

- the characteristics of interviewees;
  - age, marital status, field of study or work, language ability, educational qualifications
- the quality of interviewees' interaction with locals;
  - time spent in foreign ASEAN country, format of exchange, perspectives on cross border education experience
- interviewees' means to participate in cross border education;

[1] Jane Knight, 'Cross-border Tertiary Education: An Introduction', in *Cross-border Tertiary Education: A Way Towards Capacity Development*, ed. OECD (Paris: Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 2007), 21–43.

[2] Gathering data from social media is particularly relevant as youths in ASEAN are turning increasingly to this medium, to air their views on political and socioeconomic issues.

- o governmental or institutional agreements, scholarships, bursaries, personal finance
- and interviewees' future plans.
  - o application for further studies, employment and migration

In my interviews with personnel from the international relations offices of universities, I sought to gather information on universities':

- strategies to attract foreign ASEAN students and academics,
- programmes to help foreign ASEAN citizens integrate into local society,
- partnerships with the government to promote cross border education,
- partnerships with ASEAN institutions,
- curricula and accreditation standards, and
- financing options for foreign ASEAN citizens.

Joint initiatives by ASEAN

Cross border education has come to the increasing attention of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders in recent years. The Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration on the Roadmap for the ASEAN Community (2009–2015) listed several joint initiatives to promote regional cooperation in cross border education.[3]

ASEAN states agreed to:

- develop a university curriculum on the legal systems of member states (A.1.3),
- review ASEAN scholarship programmes (A.1),
- enhance co-operation within the ASEAN University Network (AUN) (A.5).[4]
- promote staff and student exchange among institutions of higher learning (A.1),
- promote proficiency in the English language (A.1), and
- create regional research clusters (A.1).

These joint initiatives were essentially conceived as means to facilitate economic development and social integration within the region. The Declaration specified that regional cooperation in cross border education was aimed at improving the 'well being and livelihood' of ASEAN citizens, enhancing ASEAN human resource and building an 'ASEAN identity based on friendship and cooperation'.[5] Importantly, the Declaration emphasised equitability in its development plans. Regional cooperation in cross border education was not meant to increase the income gap between more developed and less developed countries. Rather, it was aimed at promoting 'equitable and inclusive development', equal access to education and poverty reduction.[6]

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[3] Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN Secretariat, *Roadmap for an ASEAN Community 2009–2015* (Jakarta: Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2009), 8; 67–73; 104.
[4] ASEAN member states founded the ASEAN University Network (AUN) in 1995 to advance regional co-operation among universities in the region. The AUN administers scholarship applications, credit transfers and quality assessments for ASEAN students and educational institutions. More information on the AUN can be found at: 'ASEAN University Network', http://www.aunsec.org.
[5] *Roadmap for an ASEAN Community 2009–2015*, 67–68.
[6] *Roadmap for an ASEAN Community 2009–2015*, 95. Moreover, the Declaration states that one key goal for regional cooperation in cross border education is social integration. Connectedly, if one country were to benefit exponentially more than another, this could create unhappiness, thereby impede efforts to strengthen socio-cultural ties across the region.

Since the signing of the Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration, some jointly agreed initiatives have witnessed more rapid progress than others. A university curriculum covering the legal systems of member states has yet to be finalised.[7] More generally however, AUN has hosted a workshop, to gather expert opinions on what should be included in an ASEAN studies programme offered by universities. It has also conducted training for professors in the region, to guide them in their implementation or refinement of ASEAN Studies programmes.[8]

AUN advertises scholarship opportunities for ASEAN students on its web site. One of the scholarships it administers, for example, is the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN–BAC) Scholarship. Borne out of the Declaration, the ASEAN–BAC Scholarship gives 50 ASEAN students each year, the opportunity to enrol in programmes relating to business and technology at Tan Tao University in Vietnam. The list of scholarships advertised by AUN however, is not comprehensive. Under the section 'ASEAN Scholarships', only 15 scholarships are listed. Scholarships offered by member universities are either not advertised or inaccessible.[9]

To promote student mobility across the region, AUN has implemented the ASEAN Credit Transfer System (ACTS), a common framework for assessing applications for student exchange among member universities. The ACTS developed by AUN however, applies only to its 26 member universities. Separately, under the auspices of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO), the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED) has been tasked to explore ways, to develop a credit transfer system that would cover the wider Southeast Asian region.[10] Such a system however, is unlikely to be implemented in the near future.

SEAMEO RIHED also operates the ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) programme, which co-ordinates student exchange among universities in ASEAN. In 2010–2011, it implemented a pilot AIMS programme where 23 participating universities from Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand hosted 150 exchange students. It aims to achieve 500 student exchanges by the year 2015.[11] On their own, many ASEAN universities have initiated bilateral and multilateral partnership agreements, to facilitate reciprocal student exchange.

On the promotion of proficiency in the English language, the SEAMEO Regional Language Centre (SEAMEO RELC) offers a range of courses and seminars on the English language to ASEAN citizens. Course areas covered by SEAMEO RELC include 'methodology, language assessment, classroom research and professional teacher development'.[12]

AUN and SEAMEO also operate networks and centres that promote research in specialised areas. To list two examples, AUN operates the Southeast Asia Engineering Education Development Network (SEED-Net), which co-ordinates research on various fields of engineering.[13] SEAMEO operates the Southeast Asian Regional Centre for Tropical Biology (SEAMEO Biotrop), which conducts research on areas such as agriculture, biodiversity, fishery and forestry. Networks and centres such as SEAMEO RELC, SEED-Net and

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[7] The National University of Singapore has on its own, set up a Centre for Asian Legal Studies (CALs). CALs could potentially provide leadership on the development of an ASEAN centred law curriculum.
[8] 'ASEAN Studies', accessed 31 July 2013,
http://www.aunsec.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=95&Itemid=704.
[9] 'ASEAN Scholarship', accessed 31 July 2013,
http://www.aunsec.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=80&Itemid=682.
[10] 'Credit Transfer System', accessed 31 July 2013, http://www.rihed.seameo.org/?page_id=353.
[11] 'Student Mobility (AIMS)', accessed 31 July 2013, http://www.rihed.seameo.org/?page_id=186.
[12] 'Courses', accessed 31 July 2013, http://www.relc.org.sg/Courses/.
[13] 'About Us', accessed 31 July 2013, http://www.seed-net.org/info.php.

SEAMEO Biotrop were established, and have been active, years before the signing of the Declaration.[14]

Findings on Thailand

In Thailand, the Higher Education Commission (HEC), a department of the Ministry of Education, 'supervises and oversees' the country's higher education institutions. [15] To enhance the quality of higher education in the country, HEC has adopted three key strategies: decentralisation, upgrading of research capabilities and establishment of a common qualifications framework.

HEC encourages the conversion of Thai public universities to autonomous universities. Under this initiative, university councils of autonomous universities are granted authority to manage academic, personnel and budget matters. Autonomous universities continue to receive regular grants from the government and their employees enjoy remuneration at levels similar to those of other civil servants. HEC is of the opinion that transformation of public universities to autonomous universities facilitates the efficient running of universities.[16]

One key aim of the HEC is to improve the country's quality of research, thereby increase the international profile of higher education in Thailand. Towards this end, it implemented the National Research University Initiative. As part of this initiative, HEC appointed nine universities as national research universities, and tasked them to conduct research on areas that impact the country's development.[17] In addition to their regular grants, national research universities receive supplementary monetary injections from the government, for the upgrading of their overall research capabilities.

To increase the mobility of university staff and students, the Ministry of Education implemented a common credit transfer system in 2009. Termed the Thailand Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQFHE), the system provides a common benchmark for assessing credits and qualifications issued by Thai universities. In implementing this system, the Ministry of Education hopes that degrees and qualifications issued in Thailand will increasingly gain recognition in the region.[18]

Despite progress in the areas of research production and quality assurance, enhancement of Thailand's higher education system may be hampered by financing problems. Many universities in Thailand face fund shortage, which limits their ability to launch new research

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[14] 'Vision, Missions & Goals', accessed 31 July 2013, http://www.biotrop.org/about.php?act=visi.
[15] Prior to 2003, Thailand had two education ministries, the Ministry of Education, which oversaw basic education, and the Ministry of University Affairs, which supervised both public and private universities. In 2003, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of University Affairs and the National Education Council were merged to form the new Ministry of Education. The Office of Higher Education Commission (OHEC) serves as secretariat for the HEC. Its main tasks include formulation of policy recommendations and criteria for resource allocation, compilation of data on higher education, and performance monitoring.
[16] 'History', Office of the Higher Education Commission, Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy, Ministry of Education, Thailand, accessed 25 June 2013, http://inter.mua.go.th/main2/page_detail.php?id=3.
[17] The nine universities are Chulalongkorn University, Chiang Mai University, Thaksin University, Burapha University, Mahidol University, King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Mahamakut Buddhist University, and Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Buddhist University.
[18] On a smaller scale, HEC administers short term staff and student exchange programmes. There are currently three active programmes – the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific programme, the Students and Staff Exchange with Greater Mekong Subregion Countries programme, and the ASEM–DUO Fellowship programme.

projects, upgrade infrastructure, hire better qualified academics and conduct professional training for staff. A part of this problem stems from conversion of public universities into autonomous universities. While conversion may have reduced bureaucratic red tape, it has also placed greater pressure on university councils, to seek alternative sources of funding, so as to meet expenditure requirements. Those less able to procure alternative sources of funding have either had to pass on their cost burden to consumers, or to introduce cost cutting measures.

The HEC publicly admits that the 'public financing of Thai universities is still inadequate and not well-focussed'. To address inadequate financing of universities, it is exploring the following strategies: linking some portion of financing to performance, creating a buffer organisation which universities can consult on budget matters and encouraging universities to set up a contribution scheme plus a university development fund scheme. The former scheme collects donations from benefactors while the latter sets aside funds specifically for staff development and research inquiries into matters of national consequence. [19] The success of these strategies remains to be seen. In the shorter run, we would expect the problem of university financing to persist.

To better promote Thailand as a destination for higher education, HEC set up the Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy (BICS), whose raison d'être is to develop Thailand into a 'regional education hub in Southeast Asia'. As part of the National Plan for Higher Education Development (2008–2022), BICS has been tasked to increase the intake of international students from 20,000 to 100,000. The BICS closely aligns its aims with ASEAN aims. It does not aspire to make Thailand an education hub for the world. Rather, it states explicitly that it aspires first and foremost, to make Thailand an education hub for the region. The BICS also states that it works closely with ASEAN organisations, including AUN and SEAMEO. It lists joint efforts to develop cross border education in Southeast Asia as an integral part of its work to promote cross border education in Thailand.

On their own, universities and government organisations in Thailand offer scholarships and loans to foreign ASEAN citizens. [20] To better attract foreign students, teachers and researchers, some Thai universities have launched programmes conducted in the English language, particularly Master of Business Administration (MBA) programmes. [21] Thai universities are also turning increasingly to overseas recruitment agents, as well as advertising on foreign newspapers and the Internet, to market their courses.

The BICS conducted a 2010 study on cross border education in Thailand. Table 1.8a shows that of the top 10 source countries for international students in Thailand, the top five belong

[19] Office of the Higher Education Commission, Thailand, (Bangkok: Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2010), Executive Report: Framework of the Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education of Thailand,
http://www.mua.go.th/~bpp/developplan/download/long_range_plan/executive_report_eng.pdf.

[20] 'Chulaborn Graduate Institute - ASEAN Foundation Scholarship 2013', ASEAN University Network, accessed 28 January 2013,
http://www.aunsec.org/site/main/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=376:2013-chulabhorn-graduate-institute-asean-foundation&catid=23:scholarships-asean-&Itemid=82; '4 Scholarships for ASEAN Students in 2013. 2011', Chulangkorn University Faculty of Communication Arts, accessed 28 January 2013, http://www.inter.commarts.chula.ac.th/asean-scholarship.html.

[21] 'Study in Thailand 2008–2009', Office of the Higher Education Commission, Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy, Ministry of Education, Thailand, accessed 31 July 2013.
http://inter.mua.go.th/main2/article.php?id=29.

[21] 'History', Office of the Higher Education Commission, Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy, Ministry of Education, Thailand, accessed 25 June 2013,
http://inter.mua.go.th/main2/page_detail.php?id=3.

to the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS).[22] Table 1.8b shows that 80 percent of international students are self-funded, while 16 percent are on scholarship. As one would anticipate, the most popular tertiary qualifications pursued by international students are the Bachelor degree and the Master degree. (Table 1.8c)

Table 1.7a: Top ten source countries

Source country	Number of international students
China	9,329
Laos	1,311
Myanmar	1,310
Vietnam	1,100
Cambodia	944
USA	826
Korea	437
Japan	394
Germany	389
Bangladesh	376

Source: Office of the Higher Education Commission, Thailand, *Foreign Students in Thai Higher Education Institutions 2010* (Bangkok: Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2010).

Table 1.7b: Sources of funding

Fund source	Number of international students
Self funded	16,146
Thai scholarship	1,961
Overseas scholarship	1,255
N/A	793

Source: Office of the Higher Education Commission, Thailand, *Foreign Students in Thai Higher Education Institutions 2010* (Bangkok: Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2010).

Table 1.7c: Types of qualification pursued by international students

Qualification	Number of international students
PhD	656
Bachelor	13,138
Master	3,371
Graduate Diploma	566
Certificate	2,078
N/A	353

Source: Office of the Higher Education Commission, Thailand, *Foreign Students in Thai Higher Education Institutions 2010* (Bangkok: Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2010).

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[22] The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) countries include Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Beginning in 1992, GMS countries entered into more comprehensive economic co-operation under the direction of the Asian Development Bank.

To better understand the cross border education policies of Thai universities, I conducted interviews with the vice president of International Relations at Mahidol University and the director of International Affairs at Assumption University. Below is a summary of my findings.

In the latest QS university rankings, Mahidol University was ranked the number one university in Thailand. Mahidol University is an autonomous public university. In addition to grants from the government, it generates income from research contracts, tuition fees and healthcare services. Mahidol University's international students come mainly from Myanmar, Vietnam, Indonesia, Nepal and Bhutan. Its aim is for international students to head back to their home country, to contribute to capacity building. That said, the university admits that it cannot prevent international students from using Thailand as a stepping board to head to other countries.[23]

The university offers about 550 academic programs, of which 150 are conducted in English. Competition for a place in Mahidol University is stiff. As an estimate, only 4,000 out of 10,000 applicants are accepted. Mahidol University offered approximately 50 scholarships in 2012. It intends to set up a separate scholarship scheme exclusively for foreign ASEAN citizens, to give the less privileged from Southeast Asia, a higher chance of obtaining a scholarship. Mahidol University has a strong background in the medical sciences, in particular, the research of tropical diseases that plague Southeast Asia. It believes that it contributes to development in other Southeast Asian countries by passing on medical knowledge to foreign ASEAN students and academics.

Unlike Mahidol University, Assumption University is a privately run university with Catholic roots. It has the largest number of international students in any Thai university. Its key attraction for international students is that it conducts all its courses in English.[24] Of its 100 plus programmes, approximately 35 focus on business administration while 37 focus on information technology. Its international students come mainly from China, Vietnam, South Korea, Taiwan and India. It relies on the Internet, education fairs and recruitment agents to promote its courses to international students. Assumption University offers interest-free loans for a student's first six months at university. Loans will be converted to scholarships if students achieve a grade point average (GPA) of 3.85 out of 4.00, or higher. The university also has links with Christian based agencies that offer 5 to 7 scholarships a year. In the main however, international students are self funding. This stems partly from the fact that Assumption University's key source of funding is international student fees.

As part of my fieldwork in Thailand, I also conducted interviews with students from Chulalongkorn University, Mahidol Univesity and University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce. At Chulalongkorn University, I interviewed two students from Cambodia. Both had received scholarships from the university and were studying for an MA in Southeast Asian studies. Importantly, their research covers the topic of social integration in ASEAN. One is studying the sexual exploitation of Cambodians in Thailand. He plans to return to Cambodia, to work in an NGO that is situated at the Thai-Cambodian border. The other is studying the prevalence of anti-Vietnamese sentiments in Cambodian election campaigns. He hopes that his research can be used to counter the spread of anti-Vietnamese sentiments that had been propagated by the Khmer Rouge regime. In the longer run, he intends to return to Cambodia, to work as a lecturer.

Both students are very grateful for the opportunity to study in Thailand. They are of the opinion that there is much that Cambodia can learn from Thailand. The latter has a sound economy, good infrastructure, and relative to Cambodia, abundant supply of primary

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[23] The vice presidents observed that Myanmese and Nepalese were more likely to remain overseas upon graduation.
[24] The only exception is the degree in Law, which is taught in both Thai and English.

education. Their thoughts on their study experience in Thailand however, are somewhat mixed. While they feel that Thais are friendly, they find it difficult to communicate with locals as they do not speak the Thai language. Also, they feel that Thais have a superiority complex and view Cambodians as belonging to a lower social class. They also do not view the standard of living in Thailand to be better than that in Cambodia — traffic congestion and air pollution are severe problems in Bangkok.[25]

At Mahidol University, I conducted a joint interview with two students, one from Indonesia and one from Myanmar. Both are pursuing a PhD in Medicine. The Indonesian received a scholarship from a scheme that was borne out of the H5N1 outbreak, while the Myanmese received a scholarship from the Thailand International Development Cooperation Agency (TICA).

Both students were impressed with the medical training they have received in Thailand. The Indonesian expressed that laboratories in Mahidol University are well-equipped and that the school collaborates with many overseas experts.[26] The Myanmese opined that there is much to be learnt from the research culture in Thailand. In Myanmar, the military runs few research institutes and doctors are at a loss as to the treatment options for diseases encountered in the rural areas.[27] The issue of brain drain does not apply to both students. The Indonesian has to return to her home country, to serve her scholarship bond. The Myanmese belongs to the military, and expressed that there will be severe repercussions if he chooses not to return.

Both students have had generally positive experiences living in Thailand. They find Thai people friendly and think it is easy to get around in Bangkok. While the Indonesian notices that there are religious differences between Indonesians and Thais, she does not find these differences discomforting. The Myanmese shared that he faced a language barrier and found it difficult to communicate with patients. He relies on a translator when he makes his rounds at hospitals.

At the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, I interviewed two students, one from Laos and another from Vietnam. The Laotian is pursuing a graduate degree in International Business Management. Among all the interviewees, the Laotian had the least difficulty assimilating to life in Thailand. The spoken Laotian language is almost identical to the spoken Thai language, except for differences in intonation. Moreover, it is very convenient for her for visit her family – her home is only a 12-hour bus ride away.[28] The Vietnamese is an undergraduate pursuing a degree in International Business Management. His family operates an IT business and he has plans to set up a logistics company in Thailand that serves the Southeast Asian region. Though he will not be returning to Vietnam in the short term, he believes that he will contribute to his home country by setting up business links between Thailand and Vietnam. He has acquired the ability to communicate verbally in Thai.

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[25] Though both students are undertaking cross border education in Thailand, they are not acquainted with the ASEAN University Network (AUN). One is not aware of the AUN's existence while another hears that it provides scholarships for student exchange in Korea. Of interest, both students expressed reservations about the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by the year 2015. They are of the opinion that this may hurt importing countries such as Cambodia. Moreover, socio-cultural foundations for economic exchange are weak. Prior to 2015, more needs to be done, to enhance social integration within ASEAN. They recommend ASEAN collaboration in cross border education as one integrative measure.

[26] Mahidol University has a long term research partnership with Oxford University.

[27] The issue of brain drain does not apply to both students. The Indonesian has to return to her home country, to serve her scholarship bond. The Myanmese belongs to the military, and expressed that there will be severe repercussions if he chooses not to return.

[28] The bus ride is very affordable. A return ticket costs USD 16.

Findings on Malaysia

Beginning in the early 1990s, Malaysia witnessed a wave of education reforms. In 1991, then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad launched Vision 2020, a comprehensive work plan of which one key aim was to make Malaysia's education system world class.[29] Following the launch of Vision 2020, the Malaysian government adopted two key strategies to reform its education system: privatisation and partnership with foreign institutions. The first strategy increased supply of tertiary education and ensured that both local demand and foreign demand were met. The second strategy allowed Malaysia to ride on the reputation of established foreign institutions, thereby raise its profile as an education hub in no time.

In 1996, the Malaysian government promulgated the Private Higher Education Institutions Act (PHEI).[30] PHEI made clear the regulations and requirements for the establishment of private educational institutions. Its implementation led to an increase in the number of private institutions operating in Malaysia.[31] PHEI also set the stage for collaboration with foreign institutions. Various forms of collaboration have become prevalent. These include 1) twinning, where Malaysian universities offer foreign university programmes, 2) joint degree arrangements and 3) establishment of foreign university branches.[32]

In 2005, the Malaysian government introduced the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF), which accredits tertiary qualifications and benchmarks them against international qualifications issued in Australia, New Zealand and Europe. In linking Malaysian qualifications with international qualifications, the Malaysian government hopes to increase foreign graduates' chance of obtaining a job outside of Malaysia.[33] In the same year, the Malaysian government issued the Halatuju Report, which made recommendations for the longer term development of higher education. Notably, the report encouraged local institutions to promote their programmes outside of Malaysia. On its part, the government will dedicate resources, to increase the number of staff and student exchanges with other countries.[34]

Following the Halatuju Report, the Malaysian government issued the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) in 2007. Similar to the Halatuju report, the plan specified that the government would commit to improving the quality of teaching and research in tertiary institutions. It would also pump in more resources to internationalise education, thereby increase the number of international students to 100,000 by the year 2010.[35] In sum, since the early 1990s, the Malaysian government has made persistent efforts to raise Malaysia's profile as an international hub for tertiary education.

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[29] 'Some Key Public Sector Economic Policies', accessed 25 June 2013, Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, http://www.pmo.gov.my/?menu=page&page=1900.

[30] Thailand had such an act instituted in 1973.

[31] The Ministry of Education records that Malaysia today operates 81 public higher education institutions: 20 universities, 24 polytechnics and 37 community colleges. Alongside public establishments, it operates 537 private higher education institutions: 33 universities, 4 foreign university branches and 500 colleges.

[32] Yean T. Siew, 'Trade in Higher Education Services in Malaysia: Key Policy Challenges', *Higher Education Policy*, no. 23 (2010): 99–122. Foreign university branches can only be set up at the invitation of the Malaysian government. More renowned foreign universities with branches include: Monash University, Curtin University, Nottingham University and Swinburne University.

[33] Jane Knight and Sirat Morshidi, 'The Complexities and Challenges of Regional Education Hubs: Focus on Malaysia', *Higher Education* 62, no. 5 (2011): 593–606; Ka H. Mok, 'The Rise of Transnational Higher Education in Asia: Student Mobility and Studying Experiences in Singapore and Malaysia', *Higher Education Policy* 25 (2012): 225–41.

[34] 'National Higher Education Action Plan 2007–2010', Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, accessed June 25, 2013, http://www.mohe.gov.my/transformasi/images/1_bi.pdf.

[35] 'National Higher Education Action Plan 2007–2010'.

With reference to Table 1.8 below, in 2008, the top five source countries for international students in Malaysia were China, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria and Bangladesh. Apart from China, the other four countries have significant Muslim populations. Of interest, apart from Indonesia, no other ASEAN country features in the top-ten list.

Table 1.8a: Top ten source countries

Source country	Number of international students
China	10,355
Indonesia	10,020
Iran	6,245
Nigeria	6,054
Bangladesh	3,586
Yemen	3,058
Botswana	2,362
Sudan	2,039
Iraq	1,653
Pakistan	1,650

Source: *'International Student Statistics as at 31 December 2008', Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, accessed 25 June 2013, http://www.mohe.gov.my/educationmsia/.*

Tertiary education in Malaysia today comes under the auspices of the Ministry of Education (MOE).[36] MOE lists profit generation as a key reason for promoting cross border education in Malaysia. In particular, it notes that cross border education can become an 'important export commodity that will generate foreign exchange for the country'.[37] To advertise cross border education opportunities in Malaysia, MOE has set up four education promotion centres in Beijing, Dubai, Jakarta and Ho Chi Minh. It has also set up student departments in 9 countries, to assist international students on matters relating to academics, religion and employment.[38] In addition, the Malaysian government has set up a special department named 'Education Malaysia', whose key task is to provide comprehensive online information on cross border education in Malaysia. Education Malaysia highlights two key pull factors to potential international students: internationally recognised qualifications guaranteed by the MQF, and affordability. [39]

Table 1.8b below shows an estimate published at the Education Malaysia website, of the costs incurred if a student were to study at a branch campus of an Australian university in Malaysia, versus those of studying at the main campus of the same Australian university in Australia. The total difference in cost is USD 56,320.

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[36] The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) was devolved from the Ministry of Education in 2004 but merged back into the latter in 2013. Previously, MOE had managed private education while MOHE managed higher education.

[37] 'Department of Higher Education', Director General, Department of Higher Education, Malaysia, accessed 25 June 2013, http://www.mohe.gov.my/educationmsia/index.php?article=dept.

[38] 'Organisation Structure', Education Marketing Division, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, accessed 25 June 2013,
http://www.mohe.gov.my/educationmsia/index.php?article=mepc.

[39] See The Bangkok Post, 'Studying Abroad? Take a Look at Malaysia', *The Bangkok Post*, 22 April 2010.

Table 1.8b: Comparison of costs incurred at branch campus in Malaysia versus main campus in Australia

	Branch campus in Malaysia	Main Campus in Australia
Tuition fees for 3-year BA in Computer Science	USD 8,650	USD 17,000
Living Costs	USD 5710	USD 16,430
Health Insurance	USD 60	USD 32,440
Total	USD 41,010	USD 97,330

Source: *'Cost of Studying', Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, accessed 25 June 2013, http://www.mohe.gov.my/educationmsia/education.php?article=study.*

If the cost of undertaking degree programmes at foreign branch campuses remains unaffordable, Malaysia offers cheaper alternatives. With reference to Table 1.8c below, a BA education in Arts or Business at a private local university in Malaysia, is significantly cheaper than that offered in New Zealand, Australia or Singapore.

Table 1.8c: Cost of 3-year BA in Arts or Business in various countries

Country	Total Cost
New Zealand (public university)	USD 64,500
Australia (public university)	USD 51,000
Singapore (private university)	USD 49,500
Malaysia (private university)	USD 27,000

Source: *'Cost of Studying', Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, accessed 25 June 2013, http://www.mohe.gov.my/educationmsia/education.php?article=study.*

On its part, the Malaysian government has spearheaded the supply of lower cost education. Its investment arm established Iskandar Educity in Johore, a 2,350 acre campus that would eventually house 8 foreign linked universities. Costs savings are gained through the sharing of facilities, as well as teaching and administrative resources. Iskandar Educity forms part of a larger economic development zone in Johore and is located in close proximity to Singapore. In addition to cost savings, the Malaysian government advertises that Iskandar Educity will give international students access to job and business opportunities in Johore and Singapore.[40]

As part of my fieldwork in Malaysia, I interviewed the international relations personnel of three private universities, Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (Unirazak), International Centre for Education in Islamic Finance (INCEIF) and MAHSA University.

Unirazak markets itself as a private boutique university, which supplies niche tertiary education. The international relations personnel at Unirazak observed that if given free choice, students applying for tertiary education in Malaysia will choose first to study at a branch campus of a foreign university, followed by a public university. Most students however, are unable to exercise free choice. Education at a branch campus of a foreign

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[40] Zazali Musa, 'Educity to be Top of the Class', *The Star*, 14 September 2009, http://biz.thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2009/9/14/business/4607432&sec=business.

university is too costly for most families, while student intake for public universities is highly limited. Granted these constraints, Unirazak aims to attract students who cannot afford foreign degree programmes and are unable to procure a place at a public university.

To carve out its niche in the market for private education, Unirazak pays close attention to the needs of the Malaysian economy, and those of neighbouring countries. At present, it specialises in offering students an undergraduate education in business and finance, coupled with professional accreditation. One example of the latter is the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) qualification issued by Australia. Armed with internationally recognised professional accreditation, Unirazak believes that its graduates will stand a higher chance of gaining employment, vis-à-vis graduates of other private universities.

At present, Unirazak only offers scholarships to local students. Its intake of foreign ASEAN citizens is also very small. Of its first cohort of approximately 300 students, only 4 are foreign ASEAN citizens. Despite its small initial intake, Unirazak believes it has the potential to attract more foreign ASEAN citizens. Importantly, it hopes to leverage on growing demand for education in Islamic banking and finance.[41]

The next institution, INCEIF, is a graduate tertiary institution that specialises in education of Islamic finance and banking. Unlike conventional banking, Islamic banking complies with Muslim shariah law, which emphasizes two key principles: the avoidance of usury and the fair division of risks and returns. The ways in which these two principles are exercised in practice are however, multi-faceted and complex. Moreover, few have knowledge as to how the Islamic banking sector can be linked to the conventional banking sector. The director of international relations at INCEIF noted that demand for knowledge on Islamic finance is growing at remarkable speed. This demand stems not only from the gulf countries, but also from countries that manage fund inflows and investments from Muslim states.

Tertiary institutions in Malaysia such as INCEIF, are particularly well placed to meet this demand. This is because the Malaysian government plays a central role in developing, regulating and accrediting qualifications on Islamic finance and banking.[42] INCEIF for example, was set up and funded by the central bank, Bank Negara Malaysia. Support from the government inspires confidence and makes INCEIF an attractive option for internationals that require knowledge on Islamic finance in their line of work. Besides, courses in INCEIF are taught in English. Approximately 65 percent of the INCEIF student cohort is made up of internationals. Most of the internationals at INCEIF self fund; they tend not to remain in Malaysia upon graduation as it is difficult to obtain an employment pass.

Unlike Unirazak and INCEIF, which specialise in business and finance, MAHSA University specialises in the medical sciences. MAHSA started off as a nursing school, but expanded its degree programmes to include medicine, dentistry and allied health as local demand for medical staff from these sectors increased. As MAHSA's degree programmes are accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency, local graduates can easily find employment in the local health industry. To compete with foreign university branches in Malaysia, MAHSA offers significantly lower prices. According to the director for collaborations at MAHSA, a medical degree programme at MAHSA is priced at approximately 96,000 USD, while that offered at a foreign university branch is approximately 64,000 USD more.

MAHSA at present, does not view the Southeast Asian region as its key target area. This is partly because the number of students in the neighbouring region that can afford to pay MAHSA's school fees is very limited. MAHSA would rather focus its energies on attracting students from the middle class in Africa. In the longer run, MAHSA may look into the

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[41] Kristiano Ang, 'Filling a Niche for Islamic Banking', *New York Times*, 26 March 2013.
[42] Zazali Musa, 'Four Key Areas Identified to Attract Foreign Students', *The Star*, 12 June 2011.

Vietnamese and Myanmese markets, when the economies of these two countries have become more developed. Currently, MAHSA has achieved Thai accreditation for its courses. It also accepts some Indonesians on an ad hoc basis, for political-humanitarian reasons.

During my fieldwork stint in Malaysia, I also interviewed three foreign ASEAN citizens studying at the University of Malaya. The first interviewee was a Myanmese undertaking a PhD in Educational Studies. She has lived in Malaysia for three years with her husband. Culturally, she found it very easy to adapt to life in Malaysia as she is Muslim. Comparatively, in Myanmar, religious misunderstandings have brewed in recent years, which have made life uncomfortable for some Muslims. That observed, the interviewee shared that she loves her country and intends to return home upon graduation. Prior to her stay in Malaysia, the interviewee had lived and worked in Singapore. She had wanted to pursue her graduate studies in Singapore but found the tuition fees and cost of living unaffordable. In addition to her PhD studies, the interviewee teaches the Burmese language at the Southeast Asian Studies department of the University of Malaya. She notes that as her country is opening up, there is growing demand from foreigners to learn the Burmese language.[43] Though she is based in Malaysia, she believes that she is contributing to her home country by educating others about Myanmar's history, culture and language.

The second interview was carried out with two ethnic Chinese Indonesian students who were on an exchange programme at the University of Malaya. One is male, and the other female. Both interviewees are from Tanjungpura University in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. Tanjungpura University has an agreement with the University of Malaya, which allows students from the former to undertake exchange studies at the latter. Students from Tanjungpura will not incur additional tuition fees. Both interviewees expressed that this agreement has given them the opportunity to study in a renowned university in Malaysia, which they would otherwise not have been able to afford.

School-wise, both interviewees are impressed with the use of information technology at the University of Malaya. While the male interviewee found the standard of teaching at the University of Malaya somewhat similar to that in his home country, the female interviewee opined that the content covered at the University of Malaya is better. Still, she qualified that some of the content she was acquiring may be rather useless. For example, one of her courses on Islamic finance and banking required her to memorise rules and regulations implemented in Malaysia. These rules and regulations are however, not applicable in her home country.

The interviewees suggested two areas that the University of Malaya could work on, to improve the experiences of exchange students: visa application process and social integration. Though both interviewees have been in Malaysia for three months, the university has not processed their long-stay student visas. Both interviewees also shared that they faced difficulty when communicating with local students. Though both could speak the local language, local students still preferred to omit them from work discussions and in their social interactions.

Findings on Singapore

Among the three countries, the Singapore government has played the most active role, in promoting its country as a hub for cross border tertiary education. This stems in part from the fact that it enjoys a healthy budgetary surplus and can afford to invest heavily in human resource, infrastructure and advertising. In the early years of the new millennium, the Singapore government implemented the Global Schoolhouse initiative and the Singapore

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[43] The interviewee also publishes her research findings in the Burmese language.

Education initiative, large scale programmes to market cross border tertiary education in Singapore. It aims to attract 150,000 international students to Singapore, by the year 2015.[44]

Under these two programmes, the Singapore government offers financial incentives, to entice leading foreign institutions, to form academic partnerships.[45] As a result of the government's efforts, renowned institutions such as INSEAD and the German Institute of Science and Technology (TUM) have set up branches in Singapore. Local universities have also formed partnerships with foreign universities. These include the Duke–NUS Medical School and the Yale–NUS College, Singapore's first liberal arts college.

The Singapore government hopes that foreign partnerships would mould Singapore's education system into one that nurtures greater creativity and greater entrepreneurial spirit, thereby assist graduates in tackling the challenges associated with increasing globalisation.[46] Similar to the case of Malaysia, Singapore also hopes that its links with established foreign tertiary institutions will raise its profile and reputation as a hub for cross border education.[47] To better control the quality of foreign linked tertiary institutions, the Singapore government has put in place the EduPlus Certificate Scheme. Under this scheme, private tertiary education institutions are required to meet the government's strict standards on matters relating to academics, student affairs, corporate governance and administration.[48]

Similar to the case of Thailand, the Singapore government decided to grant publicly funded universities autonomous status. In 2005, it implemented a University Corporatisation Act that stipulated the devolution of administrative and managerial powers from the Ministry of Education to universities. University councils will have to play a dominant role in charting the development of their respective institutions, ensuring long term financial sustainability and maintaining the quality of staff and students. The Singapore government hopes that decentralisation will give universities greater flexibility, to enhance the quality of their teaching and research more efficiently.[49]

The Singapore government offers generous subsidies and scholarships to the large majority of international students who wish to study at the country's public universities. Under the Tuition Grant Scheme operated by the Ministry of Education, internationals can apply for subsidies that defray the cost of their school fees. In return for the subsidies received, international students have to work for an organisation in Singapore for three years, upon graduation.[50]

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[44] 'Minister Lim Hng Kiang's written Reply to Parliament Questions on EDB's Global Schoolhouse Initiative', Lim Hng Kiang, last modified 17 October 2012,
http://www.mti.gov.sg/NewsRoom/Pages/Minister-Lim-Hng-Kiang's-written-reply-to-Parliament-Questions-on-EDB's-Global-Schoolhouse-initiative.aspx.

[45] Mok, 'The Rise of Transnational Higher Education in Asia: Student Mobility and Studying Experiences in Singapore and Malaysia', 225–41.

[46] David Chan and Tee N. Pak, 'Similar Agendas, Diverse Strategies: The Quest for a Regional Hub of Higher Education in Hong Kong and Singapore', *Higher Education Policy* 21 (2008): 487–503.

[47] It should be qualified though, that not all tie-ups with foreign tertiary institutions have been successful. Tertiary education institutions such as Johns Hopkins University, University of New South Wales (UNSW) set up branches in Singapore, but folded their operations after a short period. The University of Chicago, Booth School of Business is in the process of shifting its operations from Singapore to Hong Kong.

[48]'*Eduplus Certification Scheme',* Council for Private Education, Singapore, last modified 28 December 2012,
http://app.singaporeedu.gov.sg/asp/common/extlink.asp?url=http://www.cpe.gov.sg/for-peis/edutrust certification-scheme/edutrust-certification-scheme.

[49] Chan and Pak, 'Similar Agendas, Diverse Strategies: The Quest for a Regional Hub of Higher Education in Hong Kong and Singapore', 487–503.

[50] 'More Information on Tuition Grant', Ministry of Education, Singapore, last modified 12 June 2013, https://tgonline.moe.gov.sg/tgis/normal/studentViewTuitionGrantSubsidyInfo.action.

Public universities also administer ASEAN scholarships which cover tuition fees, board, plus living expenses, and are exclusive to foreign ASEAN citizens. ASEAN scholarships administered by the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the Singapore Management University (SMU) have no bond requirement. Both universities state explicitly that they expect scholars to return to their home country upon graduation. The ASEAN scholarship administered by Nanyang Technological University on the other hand, requires scholars to serve a three year work bond in Singapore upon completion of studies.[51]

The Tuition Grant Scheme and ASEAN scholarships offered by Singapore are well advertised across the region. Singapore's Ministry of Education pays regular promotional visits to secondary schools in Southeast Asia and places advertisements on major ASEAN newspapers.[52] To better facilitate the flow of foreign ASEAN students into Singapore, the Singapore government has streamlined its visa application process. The Immigration and Checkpoints Authority publishes that foreign tertiary education students will be issued their visas in as little as five working days.[53]

It should be noted though that private universities in Singapore do not offer the Tuition Grant Scheme or ASEAN scholarships.[54] The cost of a private undergraduate education in Singapore is steep and remains unaffordable for most foreign ASEAN citizens. To illustrate, the annual cost of undertaking a Bachelor of Business degree at the branch campus of James Cook University in Singapore is estimated to be USD 28,300.[55]

If granted financial support, many foreign ASEAN citizens do find tertiary education in Singapore a highly attractive option as the country offers well recognised degrees that pave the route for high paying employment opportunities.[56] In the 2012 QS ranking of Asian universities, the National University of Singapore came in 2nd while Nanyang Technological University came in 17th.[57]

The Singapore government's active attempts to encourage inflow of international undergraduates have however, not been entirely well received by locals. Many have voiced that this squeezes out university places for worthy Singaporean candidates. In response to local concerns, the Prime Minister of Singapore stated that it would cap the proportion of international undergraduates at current levels.[58] The Singapore government regularly reiterates to its citizens, the need to retain foreign talent on home soil. The Ministry of

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[51] 'ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship', last modified 12 June 2013,
http://admissions.ntu.edu.sg/UndergraduateAdmissions/Pages/ASEANUndergraduateScholarship.aspx.
[52] See for example, The Manila Times.net, '*3 Days Left to Apply for Singapore Scholarship', The Manila Times.net*, *21 December 2011, accessed 28 January 2013,*
http://www.manilatimes.net/index.php/opinion/columnist1/13662-3-days-left-to-apply-for-singapore-scholarship.
[53] 'Polytechnic and University', Immigration and Checkpoints Authority, last modified 20 April 2013,
http://www.ica.gov.sg/page.aspx?pageid=325&secid=182#processing.
[54] At present, Singapore has one private university (SIM University) and 9 branch campuses of foreign tertiary institutions.
[55] 'Business', last modified 31 July 2013,
http://www.jcu.edu.sg/Home/Courses/tabid/70/CourseID/23/Default.aspx. The annual tuition fee is SGD 23,882.50 (USD 18,836) and the annual cost of living is estimated to be SGD 12,000 (USD 9,464).
[56] Ravinda Sidhu, K. C. Ho, and Brenda Yeoh, 'Emerging Education Hubs: The Case of Singapore'. *Higher Education* 61, no. 1 (January 2011): 23–40.
[57] 'QS University Rankings: Asia – 2012', QS Quacquarelli Symonds Limited, accessed 25 June 2013, http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/asian-university-rankings/2012.
[58] International students made up 18 percent of the undergraduate cohort in Singapore in 2011. In 2012, 36 percent of the student cohort at the National University of Singapore was made up of internationals.

Education for example, stressed that international students 'provide important manpower support to key economic sectors after graduation'.[59]

As part of my fieldwork in Singapore, I conducted in-depth interviews with three foreign ASEAN citizens, one academic and two graduates.[60] The academic is a visiting professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP). He holds Indonesian citizenship and undertook his PhD studies at the Australian National University. For his PhD research, he focussed on the study of immunology, with the intent that his findings could be applied to solve health challenges in Asia. Upon completion of his PhD studies, he served in academia at the University of Malaya. Though he did not return to Indonesia, he contributed to research in his home country by sending laboratory supplies and setting up research collaborations between Indonesia and Malaysia. As an ethnic Chinese, he shared that bumiputera policies in Malaysia made applications for research grants frustrating. This however, spurred him to work harder, to produce better research. He also maintained the view that his aim was not to change the political system, but to make social contributions through his research.

After working in Malaysia, the interviewee moved to Switzerland with his family to work in the World Health Organisation (WHO) for thirteen years. Upon retiring from the WHO, he decided to take on a visiting professorship at the LKYSPP in Singapore. He is impressed with the vision of the LKYSPP, which aims to enhance Asia's development capacity. He hopes to pass on his knowledge on public health policymaking to students at the LKYSPP. From his work experience at the WHO, he realises that formal bureaucracies and processes may impede the development of public health policy in the region. He sees value in the ASEAN culture of negotiation and mutual concurrence, which is less bureaucratic and formal, and thus has the potential to achieve desired outcomes more efficiently.[61]

Next, I conducted interviews with an Indonesian and a Vietnamese, both graduates from Singapore's publicly funded universities. Since his younger days, the Indonesian had been groomed by his family, to take up the ASEAN scholarship for secondary school students. He sat for an examination administered by Singapore's Ministry of Education and received an all-inclusive scholarship to study in Singapore at the age of 15. During his secondary school days in Singapore, he did not interact much with locals. His classmates and residents at his dormitory were mainly Indonesians. It didn't help that he was not very conversant in the English language. Things however, took a turn when he entered the National University of Singapore. His English language skills had improved and dormitory activities at the university gave him more opportunity to interact with locals.

Upon graduation, the Indonesian served a six year work bond at PSA Singapore, the ports investment arm of the Singapore government's sovereign welfare fund. He is currently based in Indonesia, where he works for a port operations business. The interviewee had decided to return to Indonesia as job opportunities back home are more exciting. He maintains Indonesian citizenship even though it would have been easy for him to gain Singaporean citizenship. The former offers many perks such as permission to purchase large tracts of land. The interviewee is married to a Singaporean. In the shorter run, the couple intends to

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[59] 'Parliamentary Replies', Ministry of Education, Singapore, accessed 25 June 2013, http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/parliamentary-replies/2011/10/number-international-students-local-universities.php.

[60] Unfortunately, I was unable to procure interviews with the international relations personnel of universities in Singapore.

[61] Of interest, the academic is the only interviewee who identifies himself more as a citizen of the ASEAN region, than as a citizen of a particular country. He shared that his view of his identity stems partly from his profession, which involves the study of diseases in Southeast Asia, and diseases know no national boundaries. He also feels at home in any Southeast Asian country; he enjoys the food and is comfortable interacting with locals.

settle in Indonesia. They have however, expressed concerns over education for their children as recent reforms in Indonesia signal intent to give greater emphasis to Bahasa Indonesia, at the expense of English.

The Vietnamese graduate was well aware of study opportunities offered by the Singapore government when he was a secondary school student. He shared that personnel from Singapore's Ministry of Education visited public schools in Vietnam regularly, to promote undergraduate study opportunities in Singapore. The Vietnamese passed the entrance examination administered by Nanyang Technological University and was offered the Tuition Grant Scheme by the Singapore government. Under the Tuition Grant Scheme, he received a subsidy that covered 70 percent of his tuition fees. The university arranged for him to take an interest-free loan from a bank in Singapore, to cover the remaining 30 percent of his tuition fees. The interviewee's family paid for his living expenses in Singapore and he was expected to serve a three year work bond in Singapore upon graduation.

After graduating, the Vietnamese worked for 1.5 years in Singapore before placing a security deposit of 40,000 SGD (or approximately 32,000 USD) with the government, which allowed him to take a hiatus, to pursue his master studies overseas. The interviewee is currently studying at the University of British Columbia, Canada. He plans to apply for PhD studies in the United States and hopes eventually to find a job and settle there. If these plans fulfil, he will be happy for the Singapore government to forfeit the security deposit he had placed. In the event that he fails to make it to the United States, he would like to return to Singapore, to teach in a polytechnic. He is certain that he will not return to Vietnam and cites several critical push factors: a corrupt government, inadequate infrastructure, safety concerns, congestion and hot weather. He intends to remit a portion of his future income to his parents in Vietnam, but plans eventually to move them out of the country.

Analysis of findings

Compared to Europe, Southeast Asia clearly does not have as comprehensive and integrated a system of academic exchange. In Europe, the Bologna Process (1998) has led to the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), with 47 participating countries. The EHEA's central goal is to create 'comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education in Europe'. It has successfully set up the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Under the ECTS, universities of member countries issue transferable credits based on learning outcomes specified by the EHEA. Separately, Europe runs the world's most successful student exchange programme – the Erasmus Programme. The European Commission advertises that since the founding of Erasmus in 1987, approximately 3 million students and 300,000 university staff have undertaken cross border higher education. 4,000 higher education institutions from 33 countries participate in the programme. Beginning in 2007, the Erasmus Programme linked up with enterprises to procure placements for exchange students.[62]

Though co-operation in cross border education is more comprehensive and integrated in Europe than in Southeast Asia, we should perhaps bear in mind that ASEAN states may not even be looking to emulate the European model. The Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration made no mention of a higher education area or a unified exchange programme. Moreover, AUN continues to limit its intake of member universities. On the contrary, ASEAN states appear to prefer a decentralised approach to co-operation in cross border education. It has largely left national governments to chart higher education policy, local institutions to initiate academic partnerships and specialised research centres to co-ordinate research.

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[62] 'Education & Training', last modified 23 July 2013, http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/erasmus_en.htm.

It is not difficult to comprehend why a more decentralised approach may work for ASEAN. Co-ordinating curriculum and student exchange across a large number of institutions is likely to involve protracted policy processes and large human resource investment. This is particularly the case in ASEAN, where governing institutions in some states are undeveloped, and where there is great variation in the types and levels of higher education offered by member states. ASEAN academics have fed back that it is perhaps more efficient for higher education institutions themselves to initiate and form academic partnerships. This reduces bureaucratic red tape and allows for better matching of institutions with similar research and educational interests. The Indonesian academic working in Singapore for example, is of the opinion that formal regional bureaucracies and processes impede co-operation in ASEAN. On the other hand, direct negotiation among interested institutions and parties facilitates co-operation.

A more decentralised approach also allows ASEAN states to exercise greater autonomy over higher education policymaking. Some ASEAN states may wish to retain the flexibility, to co-operate more with non-ASEAN states, than with ASEAN states. Malaysia and Singapore for example, have revealed a preference for partnering world class institutions from Europe and North America. Malaysia views this as a quick means to increase the supply of higher education. Singapore views this as a means to inject creativity and innovation into its higher education system. Both countries believe such partnerships raise their reputations as hubs for quality higher education. Thailand on the other hand, focuses on attracting cross border education students from China. It also sends a substantial number of students to China for study. In 2011, the top sending countries to China were: South Korea, the United States, Japan, Thailand and Vietnam.[63] In terms of geographic proximity, cultural association and trade links, one would expect Thailand to pick China as a cross border education partner, over ASEAN states such as Brunei and the Philippines.

Though ASEAN states retain autonomy over higher education policy, their individual strategies are complementary, rather than competitive. Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore have each carved out their niche in the market for cross border higher education.

Thailand serves as a hub for the Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam (CLMV) region. It offers citizens from less developed countries, opportunities to acquire skills that can be applied to development work in their home country. The two PhD students at Mahidol University for example, focussed on research that could enhance basic healthcare provision. The Indonesian is developing a simplified method for quantifying the contents in dried blood spots, thereby make blood tests cheaper. The Myanmese studies treatment options for dengue patients.

With the support of the government, Malaysia has built up a sound reputation in the education of Islamic banking and finance. It attracts students from the Muslim world. It also attracts students from financial organisations, who require working knowledge of Islamic banking and finance. In addition, Malaysia offers foreign linked degrees at affordable rates for the middle class.

Singapore's universities have a reputation for providing world class education, at rates significantly higher than those charged by Malaysian or Thai universities. The Singapore government has poured in funds to hire academic staff with impressive qualifications, upgrade infrastructure and purchase cutting edge equipment for research. The country's national universities focus on attracting meritorious students who have performed well in university entrance examinations.

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[63] 'Study in China', accessed 3 October 2013,
http://en.csc.edu.cn/laihua/newsdetailen.aspx?cid=122&id=1399. Thailand had 1,145 students, and Vietnam had 13,549 students in China.

Quite clearly, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore appeal to different higher education demand needs. It is improbable that relations between the three countries will worsen over competition for cross border education students. As ASEAN develops, the market pie for cross border education will expand; each country is likely to have its fill.

There are similarities in the strategies that the three countries have adopted, to attract cross border education participants. All three countries actively advertise cross border education opportunities. Thailand's universities hire overseas recruitment agents, and place advertisements on foreign newspapers and on the Internet. Malaysia operates promotion centres in Indonesia and Vietnam. It has also set up a special department that specialises in promoting Malaysia as a destination for cross border higher education on the Internet. Singapore's Ministry of Education and universities pay regular visits to secondary schools across Southeast Asia, to inform students of higher education opportunities. All three countries have also opted for decentralisation of administration over universities. Thailand and Singapore have converted public universities into autonomous universities. Malaysia encourages the growth of private universities, which make autonomous decisions on funding, hiring and curricula content. Additionally, all three countries have implemented their own qualifications framework.

The cross border education challenges that each country faces however, are different. In Thailand, many universities experience fund shortage and have little choice but to pass on their cost burden to consumers of higher education. Research production is also limited as the government restricts its funding, primarily to the nine universities it has designated as national research universities. In Malaysia, the rapid proliferation of private universities has made it difficult for the government to monitor quality of teaching and quality of research. In Singapore, the local population is unhappy with the government for giving up limited places at national universities to foreign students. To increase the flow of cross border education within the region, each country will have to look into and address its unique challenges.

Impact on development and social integration

There is little doubt that education can contribute to development. Education raises human capital and accordingly, labour productivity. It allows individuals to acquire marketable capacities, hence increase employability and alleviate poverty. Higher education drives innovation and increases the number of scientists and engineers in a given population.[64]

For less developed countries, cross border education provides opportunities to acquire relevant, applicable knowledge from more developed countries. Learning from the development experiences of more developed countries can be useful on two counts. Less developed countries can avoid the mistakes that more developed countries have made. Acquiring knowledge via lateral transfer is often a much faster process than acquiring knowledge through one's own trial and error endeavours. Additionally, less developed countries often lack resources to operate high quality educational and research institutions. Cross border education addresses this limitation by giving students access to higher quality education abroad. It also offers academics, opportunities to participate in research projects, that they would otherwise lack the resources to conduct independently.[65]

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[64] Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt, 'The Challenge from South East Asia: Social Forces between Equity and Growth', in *Uneven Development in Southeast Asia*, eds. Chris Dixon and David Drakakis-Smith. (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1997), 37.

[65] See Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin, 'Developing Capacity through Cross-border Tertiary Education', in *Cross-border Tertiary Education: A Way Towards Capacity Development*, ed. OECD (Paris: Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 2007), 47–101.

From my interviews, I certainly found cases where cross border education has served to enhance the human capital of individuals from less developed countries. As detailed in earlier sections, interviewees from Cambodia and Myanmar fed back that they have benefitted from their cross border education experiences in Thailand and in Malaysia. These interviewees intend to return to their home country, to contribute in the education, development and healthcare sectors.

Cross border education however, does not necessarily facilitate more balanced development across countries. Crucially, cross border education could lead to severe brain drain for less developed countries. In the case of Singapore, brain drain does appear to be a problem for sending ASEAN countries. The Singapore government has expressed its keenness to retain foreign talent. The Tuition Grant Scheme it offers is tied to a contractual clause that requires foreign graduates to work in Singapore for three years upon graduation. Interviewees fed back that the Singapore government is inclined to approve and extend foreign ASEAN graduates' work visa applications. The Singapore government also gives foreign ASEAN graduates preferential consideration when they apply for permanent residency status. It even encourages foreign ASEAN graduates to shift their immediate families to Singapore, to settle permanently.

Moreover, there are strong push factors that dissuade citizens of less developed countries from returning to their home country. As was apparent in the case of the Vietnamese interviewee who studied in Singapore, many find salaries back home unattractive. Opportunities for career training are also limited. Much time has to be wasted navigating complex patron-client networks and inefficient bureaucracies. It is also difficult to find reasonably priced, quality education for children.[66] Foreign ASEAN graduates of Singapore's highly ranked universities may even decide to use Singapore as a stepping board, to migrate out of Southeast Asia altogether. The Vietnamese interviewee for example, shared his longer term plans to settle in the United States.

Furthermore, poorer populations that are most in need of development opportunities have restricted access to cross border education in ASEAN. Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore do offer scholarships to foreign ASEANs. The number scholarships offered however, is limited. Moreover, many of these scholarships are granted on a meritorious basis. Scholarship recipients are thus likely to come from more privileged backgrounds, whose families were able to afford better quality primary and secondary education. There are two categories of cross border education students, those on scholarship, and those who self fund. The latter category of cross border education students come from wealthier backgrounds. At present, the number of self funding cross border education students far exceeds the number of students on scholarships. As an indication, in Thailand, 80 percent of cross border education self fund, while 16 percent are on scholarship.[67]

Some countries view cross border education as a means to supplement a country's national income. Malaysia for example, views cross border education as a means to generate foreign exchange for the country. International organisations also recognise the financial making opportunities posed by increasing demand for higher education. The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) has listed higher education as a tradable service that is subject to the regulations of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), notes that 'trade in higher education is a million dollar business'.

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[66] Cao Cong, 'China's Brain Drain at the High End: Why Government Policies have Failed to Attract First-Rate Academics to Return', *Asian Population Studies* 4, no.3 (2008): 331–45.
[67] BICS was unable to procure data for the remaining 4 percent of students.

Supply of education is no longer considered an exclusive domain of the public sector. [68] As the public sector has not kept up with demand, a plethora of private players has entered the market for higher education. Private players have explicit intent to make profit and are keen to attract international students that pay higher fees. However, as detailed in an earlier section, purchasing a private education in Singapore could be prohibitively expensive for many ASEANs. While Malaysia offers private higher education at a lower cost, this is still unaffordable for poorer households in ASEAN. As the interviewee from MAHSA University shared, the school, at present, prefers to market its courses to students in Africa, than to students in Myanmar or Vietnam. The latter two countries do not have large numbers of students who can afford to pay private school fees. In another similar case, Assumption University in Thailand, the school prefers to market its courses to students in China, than to students in Myanmar or Laos.

Next, cross border education can contribute to social integration. It informs individuals of other world views, and helps them appreciate cultural diversity. At the same time, it helps individuals recognise that humanity shares many common traits that traverse cultures. [69] Cross border education in particular, provides opportunities for individuals from various cultural backgrounds to interact and to learn from each other. Frequent and regular interaction could form the foundation for greater co-operation among states in the geopolitical and economic realms.

However, it is not always the case that cross border education enhances mutual understanding and respect. Foreign students and academics may not be properly integrated into the society of their host country and can feel segregated or alienated. From their interactions, host citizens and guests may develop negative perceptions of each other. They may even express these negative sentiments in online blogs and forums, thereby fan flames of negativity. To illustrate, in late 2012, a Malaysian who had received a scholarship from the Singapore government to study Law at the National University of Singapore incurred the wrath of local citizens when he was adamant about posting sexually explicit photos online. Many Singaporeans went online to voice their distaste with foreign ASEAN scholars. One expressed: 'he talks too much about himself and his country, he shouldn't be welcome here at all'. [70] Another voiced that 'such actions just prove and reflect badly on the country you come from'. [71]

From my interviews, I collated a mixed bag of responses as regards cross border education experiences. Some interviewees experienced difficulty integrating into the local society of their host country. Examples include the two Cambodian students at Chulalongkorn University and the two Indonesian students at the University of Malaya. Other interviewees on the other hand, have integrated comfortably into the local society of their host country. Examples include the Laotian and Vietnamese at the University of the Thai Chamber of

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[68] 'Trade in Higher Education and GATS'.
http://www.unesco.org/education/studyingabroad/highlights/global_forum/gats_he/basic_gats_he.shtml.

[69] Sabrina W. M. Laine and Margaret Sutton, 'The Politics of Multiculturalism: A Three-Country Comparison', in *The Politics of Multiculturalism and Bilingual Education: Students and Teachers Caught in the Cross Fire*, eds. Carlos J. Ovando and Peter Mclaren. (Crawfordsville, Indiana: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2000), 85.

[70] Heartbeat 55, 23 October 2012, comment on 'NUS ASEAN Scholar in Sex Scandal says Malaysia is better than S'pore', STOMP, 18 October 2012,
http://singaporeseen.stomp.com.sg/stomp/sgseen/this_urban_jungle/1372606/nus_asean_scholar_in_sex_scandal_says_malaysia_better_than_spore.html.

[71] Harold1981, 19 October 2012, comment on 'NUS ASEAN Scholar in Sex Scandal says Malaysia is better than S'pore', STOMP, 18 October 2012,
http://singaporeseen.stomp.com.sg/stomp/sgseen/this_urban_jungle/1372606/nus_asean_scholar_in_sex_scandal_says_malaysia_better_than_spore.html.

Commerce (UTCC), the Myanmese at the University of Malaya and the Indonesian academic working in Singapore. In the case of Thailand, language appears to be a key factor that impedes social assimilation. The Laotian was best able to integrate into Thai society as she could speak the Thai language. The Vietnamese at UTCC had spent some years in Thailand and had learnt to speak Thai at an intermediate level.

Policy recommendations

The earlier section has shown that cross border education in ASEAN is a double edged sword. It can promote or impede balanced development. It can also promote or impede social integration. ASEAN as an organisation, and ASEAN member states, need to take steps, to steer cross border education along a path that promotes, rather than impedes, balanced development and social integration.

As a conclusion to this paper, I have come up with a list of some cross border education policy recommendations. Many of these recommendations are based on insights gained from my research. They have already been implemented, but need to be practised on a wider scale.

The following are suggestions that could aid the cause of balanced development:

- Form exchange partnerships between more renowned ASEAN universities and less established ASEAN universities.
- Maintain contact with ASEANs studying or working abroad, and update them on attractive work opportunities back homes.
- Set up a comprehensive scholarship information base, to given ASEAN students a better idea of cross border education funding opportunities.
- Promote higher education degree programmes that specialise in issues relating to development in Southeast Asia.

The following are suggestions that could aid the cause of social integration:

- Organise informal conversation groups or dormitory activities that both local and foreign ASEANs can participate in.
- Offer foreign ASEAN students teaching or research jobs on the side, which would allow them to pass on knowledge on their home country.

It is hoped that some of these suggestions will be worked on, and more importantly, that cross border education will play an increasingly active role in bridging development, and in bridging cultures across ASEAN.

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