Global context of education and the role of international education in Australia

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Introduction

This brief background paper aims to set down the main elements of the global education landscape in relation to education, especially higher education, the international education market, and Australia’s global position and positioning. It does not review the matters in detail, as much of the ground is covered in the paper by Dennis Murray et al., Backgrounder: State of current research in international education. The final part of the paper draws out policy implications, short term and long term. It should be emphasized that identifying trends and implications is a politicized and chancy business. Many judgement calls are involved. Others will differ on those judgement calls, and on some points they will prove to be right! Wisdom lies in the collective discussion and is not the private province of any one person.

At the back of the paper as Attachment 1 is a small table setting out the performance of the Confucian-heritage education systems in PISA 2009, followed by Attachment 2, an article published in The Australian (Australian Literary Review) which reflects on the rise of East Asian education and the issues and tensions within education in the modernized Confucian systems and family attitudes to education. The article also discusses some implications for Australia, for East/West relations and for the future of global society.
The virtue of this paper might lie in the fact that it is a short note rather than a full academic paper. It is not referenced. However, a continuing body of research lies behind it, including work commissioned by the Commonwealth, and Attachment 3 lists some source relevant materials. These papers are all accessible from public sources or available on request.

**Worldwide scan**

*Education, R&D and growth*

What is the relationship between mass tertiary education and economic growth, and also social and environmental sustainability? What is the relationship between investment in the various types of R&D (basic research, applied, research in universities, government laboratories, and industry) and innovation, and national innovation and national growth? Bluntly, no-one knows. Conventional policy assumptions are based on narratives about these relationships—stories which shift and change over time. It can be argued that education’s roles in relation to modernization, and the spread of social opportunity, are clearer than its role relation to wealth creation. The need for research-based innovation to source technological change is obvious, but knowledge and innovation are global. The relation between national investment in R&D and national economic growth is impossible to determine, because most of the innovations are derived from the global pool of knowledge, and most of the best national research is more likely to be utilized first outside the country than inside. Only in the USA and perhaps in the longer term in China are the national and global games the same game.

What is clear is that right now, different national governments have varied views about the value of public investments in tertiary education and R&D. In essence:

- The English-speaking countries are going through a period of ‘taken-for-grantedness’ about education and R&D (except for R&D in the United States). It is assumed that either (1) the long historical lead will be maintained even if education runs down a bit, (2) private investment can substitute effectively for public investment and will do so to the extent needed, or (3) the benefits of tertiary education and/or R&D have been exaggerated. The UK is cutting public funding to most of university teaching and
freezing research funding, and the US states are freely cutting their subsidies to tertiary education without a national groundswell against this. In the exceptional case, the US is doubling national research funding over the life of the Obama stimulus package. Australia and New Zealand seem complacent about letting investment in education and R&D drift, and erode over time. There is no real impetus for an investment-led lift in performance. Canada is the exception. Things are tightening up a bit but it continues to be more Western European than Anglo-American in policy outlook.

- The EU and especially Western Europe remain committed to the Bologna and European Research Area policy program. This entails a coordinated increase in national budgets, and securing benefits from cooperation and part integration of systems—the latter evolution is especially significant in research and in student mobility. The GFC has slowed the rate of investment but not led to a UK-style change in the policy assumptions about education and research. The Western Europeans especially are sure that higher education and research are key to the return of Europe to a global leadership role. In the university sector there are signs the stronger institutions are consolidating and becoming more strategic, and more Asia-aware (though Asia-awareness has yet to take root in the polities and in government). The German reinvestment is a major global development and the Swiss, Nordics and Netherlands/Belgium already punch well above their weight. They are pulling ahead of Australia. France is an unknown at this stage.

- East Asia and Singapore are more strongly and more fundamentally and probably more long-term committed to the idea of education and research-led development than is Europe, though they are doing it through a mix of private funding of tuition and public funding of R&D. Thus a partial privatization goes hand in hand with publicly-driven modernization and selective investment, all superintended by intensely and intelligently focused (and heavily top-down) state policies. In securing stellar rates of improvement, this combination of factors has worked very well up to now—see below.

- India lacks the strong East Asian state and despite its policy statements in practice it has only a shallow commitment to the education and R&D project, and a long way to go before an East Asian-style takeoff becomes possible. (Malaysia is similar).

- Other nations will aspire to East Asian style economic strength and raising status and many, especially in Asia and Africa, will see this as linked to the education and
research focus. They will lack the economic resources and so be poorly placed to imitate East Asia. But it is likely that in many nations the China model of tertiary education and innovation will eventually outshine the American model (even though in the real world American innovation culture will remain stronger than China’s).

What should be emphasized is that in East Asia the cultural commitment to learning and knowledge is more deep rooted than in the West, and it is more deep rooted in Western Europe than in the English-speaking nations at present. This is momentous, with incalculable long term consequences, given the role of education and research in shaping modernization. It also makes life tricky for international education providers in Australia, but offers them the opportunity to lever themselves up by riding the Asian tide (or is it riding the Asian tiger?)

**PISA comparisons**

Like university rankings PISA constitutes a major step towards a more global and less nation-bounded approach to education policy. Many nations watch their PISA position closely. It has a strong reputation building effect at global level—consider how Finland has benefited over the last decade from its exceptionally strong standing in PISA.

In the longer term PISA is also leading to an increased emphasis on schooling, both across the board school performance and the performance of the top group of students, and school resourcing and organization. It will lead to a new focus on upgrading teaching.

PISA is less important in the English-speaking world than some others (partly because English speaking countries are assured of a strong global position as bearers of the global linguistic standard). Nevertheless PISA is starting to matter more in the English-speaking world because of two factors. First, the UK and USA look bad in the PISA comparison. Second, the astonishing performance of the Confucian systems in PISA—only the Finns are in the same ballpark—is fuelling excitement about the rising East. In the OECD’s 2010 international comparison of the learning achievements of 15 year olds, known as PISA, five of the top ten systems in reading were Shanghai, Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan. In maths the top five were all Confucian - Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea and Taiwan. Japan was ninth.
In science Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan and Korea were five of the top six. (See Attachment 1). A simple and telling policy narrative is evolving, along these lines. A gross over-simplification if not downright wrong, but it works:

**smarter kids = higher quality human capital = higher productivity and more innovation = stellar economic performance and long term global competitiveness**

Australia has been largely indifferent to PISA, partly because our performance has been strong, as in Canada and New Zealand. But our performance is now declining in both absolute and relative terms; and we are behind Canada and NZ. If it weren’t for our East Asian families—who contribute to all three countries—we would be doing worse. Eventually the PISA penny is going to drop and there will be considerable anxiety about our position.

*The takeoff in East Asia and Singapore*

The action is in the systems touched by Chinese educational traditions and models of state: Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong SAR, Taiwan, Singapore and now China itself. This group of education systems has a special dynamism. All except Japan are growing knowledge-related activities very rapidly. (Japan did it in the 1970s).

Confucian Model education systems have four elements: (1) State steering and selective investment. (2) Rapidly growing educational participation, partly funded by private tuition. (3) Society-wide examinations, grounded in Chinese historical tradition that lock in participation and household investment. (4) State investment in research. All the Sinophone countries have these qualities except for Vietnam—which has just the second and third at this stage—and North Korea which is in another place and has none. Both nations are still relatively poor, also. Economic growth and achievement of a threshold level of public and private wealth are conditions of the model. All the successful systems have strong economic performance and at least Western European living standards, except for China. China is behind on the participation curve—though not on R&D. But in Shanghai, Beijing and Eastern China the level of wealth is that of a European country and the large middle class is growing fast.
The Confucian Model bypasses the liberal imaginary, in which the world is divided between market and state. There is more emphasis on private funding and the private sector than in the USA. But government has a tighter grip on education and research than in the bureaucratic systems of pre-Bologna Europe. Both state and market have been enhanced.

In 2007 South Korea’s tertiary gross enrolment rate (GER) was near 90 per cent. Japan’s was 58 per cent. China is less wealthy than other Confucian countries and there are severe regional disparities but adult literacy reached 93 per cent in 2008 (India 66, Pakistan 55 per cent). Between 1990 and 2007 China’s tertiary GER jumped from 4 to 23 per cent (India 13, Pakistan 5 per cent). The target is 40 per cent by 2020. Meanwhile project 985 is shaping research-intensive universities in China, so quality and quantity are advancing together.

The key to the Confucian Model is the willingness of families to invest privately in secondary and tertiary education and private tutoring, so as to position their children for the contest for university entry, which determines their lives. Middle class families in East Asia can spend as much on education as Western families spend on housing. In 2006 government funded just 32 per cent of tertiary costs in Japan and 23 per cent in Korea (UK 65 per cent, USA 34 per cent). Korea and Japan have large private sectors. In China most students are in the public sector. Policy is mindful of city/country balance and still fostering accelerated growth. Yet in China, too, the public share of tertiary funding fell from 96 per cent in 1978, the year of Deng Xiaoping’s four modernizations, to 45 per cent in 2005.

Families invest heavily in private tutoring outside school. In urban areas in the Confucian systems, many or most students attend second schools to improve their chances of getting in to the most favoured secondary institutions and universities in highly hierarchical systems. This happens even in the poorer Confucian country, Vietnam. In South Korea the level of investment in private tutoring has been estimated by the OECD to be 1-2 per cent of GDP. This is more than hardheaded competitive behaviour. The Confucian valuation of education runs very deep. Education does more than provide the child with the best start in life. It brings honour to the family. In contrast to all Western nations, household funding is maximized in the lower reaches of the Confucian systems, indicating the extent of popular compliance.
Public resources freed up by private investment in tuition are applied to research and development, the formation of ‘world-class’ universities and scholarship support for bright students, though the tax take is lower than in Europe/UK. Unlike Western governments, Eastern governments have found a way to grow higher education and research without breaking the bank. In contrast to the American Ivy League, the state sustains the top research institutions.

In 2007 national investment in R&D was 3.5 per cent of GDP in Korea, and 2.6 per cent in Taiwan and Singapore (UK 1.8, USA 2.7 per cent). In China the rate of investment more than doubled in ten years to 1.5 per cent of GDP in 2007. China has both the world’s largest student enrolment and one in five of world researchers. From 1995-2007 the number of science papers rose from 9061 to 56,806 (UK 47,121). From 1995-2007 China’s annual increase in science papers averaged 16.5 per cent! The rate of growth was 14.1 per cent in Korea and 10.5 per cent in Singapore (UK 0.3 per cent).

Leading research takes longer to develop. China’s share of world science output was 5.9 per cent in 2008, but it had only 2.5 per cent of the top one per cent most cited science papers. The USA is dominant with 51.6 per cent of the leading science papers. But China’s research universities are only now emerging. There is a lag of 10-15 years between research investment and full citation outcomes. China is there for the long haul. Over the next generation the gap will shrink and the top 200 universities in China, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore will multiply.

One third of the world’s R&D is conducted in the Asia-Pacific, including Australia. It will soon be 50 per cent. In our lifetimes it is likely that a majority of the world’s knowledge will be sourced from East Asia alone. India may belatedly follow.

**Global education market**

Unless there is a world war, genuine global depression or a regional depression in China and/or India the international education market will continue to expand at a faster rate than worldwide tertiary education enrolments as a whole. The process of growth is driven by a conjunction of globalization (which fosters increasing numbers of global careers and global-
smart national careers) and the expanding middle class in the emerging nations. Long term Indian demography will be the chief driver in aggregate terms but right now the main driver is the economic growth rate in China. What is much less certain is the future Australian position.

There has been significant growth in the American intake with the Obama government in place and the edge off the national security agenda. The jump in enrolments from China is ominous for Australia. The UK has followed a parallel policy pathway to ourselves and for similar reasons—the commitment to skilled labour growth has been trumped by anti-immigration politics—so they have been unable to profit from our policy position. This has been a great boon to Australia, the one piece of good news for our export industry. Canada remains if not a sleeping giant then a sleeping big brother. Potentially Canada is a dangerous long-term competitor because the quality of tertiary education is underpinned by stronger public funding and Canada is just as or more safe and tolerant as Australia.

As it continues to grow the student market will continue to differentiate with more nuanced products and a relative growth of graduate level programs. The plurality of providers will continue to extend but for the most part new providers will not so much substitute for existing export nations as complement them, unless the export nation is especially vulnerable.

Asian countries will continue to become more important attractors though at this stage China is seeking to use international education primarily to fulfil foreign policy goals—especially regional hegemony—rather than generate revenues. In that respect China has a similar approach to that of the American doctoral sector. As English language skills spread further in China—that take-up is happening at an astonishing rate—we can expect more English language programs in that country following similar developments in Southeast Asia. This will expand China’s global export potential but is unlikely to change the policy stance. China will become increasingly focused on communicating a Chinese perspective as well as fitting in with a Western one. That change is very important. Confucius Institutes are one sign of it.

The number of transnational providers in China and to a lesser extend elsewhere will continue to expand. The former near monopoly of that mode by Australia/UK has given way to a period
in which the USA is becoming the dominant provider. American universities are very active now in China, through both TNE and deep partnerships.

The world doctoral market will continue to expand along with the globalization of research. The flows are changing, however. Until five years ago the US provided half the international doctoral scholarships and well over half the total of postdoctoral awards on offer worldwide. Stay rights were exceptionally high for the two largest groups, students from China and India. These East Asian countries are becoming major doctoral providers—though quality is not there yet everywhere—and also attracting more overseas trained graduates back, a process that began in Taiwan and South Korea and has now taken root in China. Singapore will be an important high quality doctoral provider. At any given time doctoral students perform about half of the research conducted in a national system. Bright international PhD students are therefore a great boon to national research systems and no nation will exploit this more than Singapore which lives off mobile and expatriate labour. Australia seems oblivious. The only way to play in this market—which is scholarship driven not price driven—is to offer full scholarships including living costs, children’s school fees and even jobs for the spouse.

**Australia’s position**

Once a market position turns down all the supply and demand effects reinforce each other and it continues to drive down further. The change in trajectory began with the violence affecting South Asian students that slowed the expansion of our main growth area. This imbroglio fed into political perceptions that both immigration and international education were not ‘sustainable’ at present levels and the rogue college scams provided the basis for a tightening up of supply. This went much further than needed to clean up the colleges and the visa processing regime became uncompetitive viz a viz competitor countries. This and the tougher regime affecting the graduate transition to PR constituted changes on the supply side with predictable effects on the demand side. The outcome is well known. At an educated guess numbers will fall to 50-60% of peak levels and two thirds of peak levels in the universities.
The dollar will remain high for the foreseeable future. This has not been a primary factor in driving down numbers though it has eroded our immediate competitive position viz a viz the United States. The high dollar is a factor in retarding recovery, however.

The longer the downturn continues, the more there will be pressures from the stronger Australian providers to fragment brand Australia and adopt a differentiating market position. We need to trump the perception that we neglect stellar quality and our research universities are second level—as the *Times Higher* survey of reputation confirmed, it showed our ranking on ‘real’ quality is higher than our ranking on reputation—so this might not be a bad thing if it ran for a while.

**Policy implications**

Until recently the global perception of Australia was that we have good business heads and an impressive export sector but might be a bit light on for institutional quality and research. Research is where most of the world defines status and quality, even teaching quality. We were not given enough credit for some of our strengths—good PISA performance despite the run down in public schools, a much small tail of poor quality higher education than in most other countries (except those in Western Europe), and research universities that are (just) players in the big league in some areas—plant and animal science, agriculture, geology, ecology, medicine and related fields, etc. We have failed to combine our export strength with our research strength, though there are some positive reputational spill-overs from research.

The immediate issue is, what will trigger that recovery process? There is no agreement on this strategic question. A return to a lighter income test and faster processing times make sense. The removal of the ‘high risk’ source country category would help. The Knight review can be expected to loosen up visas again but this will be possible only because the change in DIAC processing will not rescue the short-term market position. Political attitudes remain set against high immigration, though given the economic boom it makes no sense. In the long-term (boom or not) it is an unsustainable position for migration-dependent Australia. However, the problem we face is that if the politics of migration turned around tomorrow it would take some years to secure the necessary shift in demand from source countries.
We will need to coordinate initiatives to loosen supply-side constraints along with efforts to stroke and nurture demand, in key countries rather than everywhere at once. A strong gesture in the direction of a global protocol offering support and protection for international students might be part of a circuit breaker package. We need one of those but the timing is crucial.

Recovery in India is not the primary issue. India is unlikely to see Australia as a high quality education nation. That was clear before the imbroglio over the violence—which fed into existing prejudices about Australia. The rapid growth in numbers from India up to 2008 was among medium quality students coming from regional areas rather than academically strong students from the major cities. In India the other English speaking nations have a natural cultural advantage over us, whereas in Southeast and part of East Asia, for differing regions, we have been in much better standing relative to the UK and USA, than we have in India.

Thus in the interim it is especially important to safeguard our position in the one global region where Australia has enjoyed secure number one export position – Southeast Asia – and to minimize the damage in China which is crucial for the full range of economic and strategic reasons. We need bright young Chinese students studying in Australia, at scale.

It is unlikely to happen but bears repeating. A substantial investment in higher quality research is probably the most cost effective way to lift both capacity and reputation in the global market. Many other nations have absorbed that logic. Why not Australia?

In the longer term, the rise and rise of China and the rest of East Asia is the defining strategic issue and everything depends on our capacity to connect effectively with that. At best we could play a regional leadership role—rising Asia could carry us in education and research as in the resource sector—but if so we have to be unambiguous about quality (more than a slogan!) and about the public investment that underpins quality. That’s how East Asian governments operate. Maybe we should start to see ourselves as like them in some respects, though our state traditions and civil society will remain primarily British and European.
In the longer term the national interest must be pursued in sustainable deep partnerships with institutions in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong SAR, South Korea, Singapore and also—though the barriers are formidable—Japan. These partnerships should be about shared capacity building, a global role, combined research programs and exchange of students, staff and systems. This would be a key aspect of a national strategy of partial integration into Asia (we are not Asian but we have an Asian face). These partnerships would be lines of information and knowledge flow, and mutual cultural and economic transformation, which would help to lift the country to a much larger role than hitherto, through its relationship with the region that will supply half of world economic activity. Such a strong university presence in East Asia would also help Australia to play the role of broker between the Atlantic world and East Asian/Western Pacific, which we always imagine but are not yet culturally integrated enough to achieve.

The stakes here are much more important than the future of the export market (though partial integration with Chinese universities alone would considerably help us in the export market). Needless to say, to pull off this long term strategy government would have to get behind it with selective investments and we would need to strengthen Asian language skills, research and graduate education to position ourselves at the top end - the only approach that can work.

**Research implications**

The need for market intelligence is ongoing and obvious, but in the past there has been little attention to the international doctoral market despite the potential for academic shortages in key areas of importance such as physical and life sciences. This should change.

Comprehensive research on our existing higher education links with Asian nations—especially the deep links—would provide us with useful strategic intelligence. An overall mapping exercise which provided a good overall strategic picture of our offshore engagement, strengths and weaknesses would be helpful, as would particular country studies. We need to go beyond looking at just the potential for recruiting students, to the full range of partnerships, combined research, etc. Government plays a major role in some of those links. There remains much AEI expertise in the Australian embassies and consulates (which needs to be foregrounded more effectively in policy circles in Canberra, and also should connect fully with providers).
## Top Ten Education Systems in PISA 2009

(mean scores, Confucian education systems in red)

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*UK equal 25th 424, USA equal 15th 500*
ATTACHMENT 2


Amy Chua
*Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*

Patrick Smith
*Someone Else’s Century: East and West in a Post-Western world.*
Pantheon, New York, 2010 242 + xi pp. RRP $25.95 USD

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
*PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do. Student performance in reading, mathematics and science, Volume 1*
OECD, Paris, 2011 272 pp. RRP 24.00 euros

‘We are doing well’, says the Dean of the Graduate School of Education at China’s Peking University, known to all as ‘Beida’, over dinner in a private room at the back of the University restaurant. ‘But we have a problem’.

Wen Dongmao, appointed as Dean in 2009, is young for one of China’s leading posts in education. Originally from Hunan, Mao Zedong’s home province, he specializes in the relationship between education and the labour markets. Like all university professors in executive positions he misses his research. At ease with himself Wen dresses in the low-key style of the Beijing government officials with whom he meets. He is frank, realistic and highly intelligent without the bells and whistles attached to star professors in the West.

**Shanghai rising**

‘Doing well’ means PISA. Eight days earlier the OECD had released the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), its cross-country comparison of the performance of 15 year olds in reading, mathematics and science. The highest rated education systems were Korea, Singapore, Finland and Hong Kong. And Shanghai. Mainland China had joined PISA for the first time. Not the whole country, just the 19 million person Shanghai district.

Shanghai is internationalized, modern and wealthy. It was expected to do well. But the performance of Shanghai was off the charts.

Shanghai students thrashed every other education system in the world in all three disciplines (see table). In mathematics their average score was 600, with second placed Singapore at 562. The Secretary-General of OECD, Angel Gurria, stated when PISA was released that ‘more than one-quarter of Shanghai’s 15-year-olds demonstrated advanced mathematical thinking skills to solve complex problems, compared to an OECD average of just 3 per cent’.

PISA again demonstrates the importance placed on education in Confucian heritage societies. Confucian systems occupy the first five places in PISA mathematics, with a sixth, Japan, in ninth place. Four of the five top education systems in reading are Confucian, five of the top six in science.
The Confucian education systems are those shaped historically by Chinese civilization, in which education has been a core element for two millenia: mainland China, Hong Kong SAR, Taiwan, Vietnam, Korea and Japan in East Asia and Singapore in Southeast Asia. In these systems Confucian respect for self-cultivation through learning and pastoral teacher-student relations are combined with modes of organizing education mostly imported from Western Europe and the United States.

East Asian scores in PISA are consistent with other patterns. Educational participation is climbing in all systems: almost 90 per cent of young people enter tertiary education in Korea and Taiwan. Research universities are improving rapidly. Between 1995 and 2007 the number of scientific papers grew by 9 per cent per annum in Taiwan, 11 per cent in Singapore, 14 per cent in Korea and 17 per cent in China, which now produces more science than the UK, Germany and Japan. China has the most university students and is the second largest R&D investor in the world.

Meanwhile the old hegemons are lagging. The UK is 28th out of the 65 education systems in PISA mathematics. The United States has the best universities but its schools are problematic. The US is 31st in PISA mathematics, tied with Portugal, with average student scores 19 per cent below Shanghai.

Australia is at 15th in mathematics. We do better in reading (9th) and science (10th) but in contrast with most other countries, our PISA scores are going down not up. The top Australian students have slipped. Australia’s performance is boosted by superior results from first and second generation East Asian migrants, but we are behind Canada and New Zealand; and like the rest of the West, except the Finns, we have been spectacularly eclipsed by Confucian education in all three disciplines.

So what is the ‘problem’ bothering Beida’s Wen? Many school students in China are working too hard, he says. The value of their education for personal and social development is doubtful and their health is at risk. It is the same story in other Confucian education systems. Professional educators are deeply worried.

After daytime school there are private classes and cram school. Youngsters put in 14 or 16 hour days. Much of it is repetition with little space for the love of learning or flights of the imagination. Sport or drama? All-round growth? Creativity? Forget it. The only thing that matters is performance. It is all about tracking exam requirements, besting massive competition and grabbing a place in prestige schools like Peking University that put students in the fast lane for the rest of their lives.

Many leaders in East Asia now believe their education systems retard the scope for individual initiative. They are selectively importing Western techniques. China funds schools specializing in creativity. In 2000 Korea decided the country had to do better in reading. Policy shifted from the traditional grammar-literature approach to a critical understanding of language. The time allocation to reading was increased, parents were drawn in and diagnostic testing stepped up. Between 2000 and 2009 the proportion of students in the top PISA category for reading rose from 5.7 to 12.9 per cent, the largest improvement of any country.

But Korea also spends well over 1 per cent of GDP on family funded private tutoring. East Asian student workloads are sustained not just by competition states but by culture. The success of the child brings honour to the family.

Which is where Amy Chua comes in.

Enter the Tiger Mother

Student achievement in Confucian heritage societies is determined by three factors. One, the comprehensive modernizing state—whether capitalist or communist. Two, society-wide
competition and selection with ancient roots in the Chinese imperial examinations. Three, the Confucian family. The last is the most important.

Education is central to the bonds uniting the Confucian family. Traditionally, children are seen as extensions of their parents. They are not choice making individuals until they reach adulthood and even then they continue to owe filial obedience. Conversely parents are expected to sacrifice all for their children and spare no effort to prepare them for the best possible start. Self-formation through education is the instrument of social success but also more than that. It is an act of piety, part of the child’s duty to the parents and the duty of parents to the ancestral lineage of the family. An educated child brings honour to the family and better protects continuity with the ancestors, thereby locating the family in and beyond time.

Within the inherited Confucian parent-child relationship, the child’s responsibility is regulated by conventions such as xiao, obey your parents, and guang zong yao zu, bring glory to your ancestors. Parental responsibility is indicated by zi bu jiao fu zhi guo, if children are uneducated the parent is to blame; and even gun bang zhi xia chu xiao zi, bad children can be made into good children by beating them with sticks.

As Professor Wen shows, traditional attitudes are changing. But in Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother Yale Law Professor Amy Chua takes us inside a Chinese-American family where her two daughters have been brought up along these lines, though without the sticks. At once familiar and alien, Battle Hymn is fascinating and disturbing for Western audiences. It has triggered outraged howls (invaluable publicity, of course) on both sides of the Pacific. In the US Chua’s parenting techniques are seen as inhumane. In China she is charged also with holding Chinese traditions up to ridicule.

Chua has a knack for lighting rod books that touch a current nerve and promise insight into widely felt problems. Her explanations are cultural and sourced in her personal experiences. World on Fire (2003), soon after 9/11, argued that exporting the American way of life was bound to provoke a backlash. Free markets fan anger against ‘market-dominant minorities’. Democracy provides the means of expressing that resentment. The successful minorities discussed by Chua were the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, including her own family, and the United States at global level.

In Day of Empire (2007) Chua tapped into the vast discussion on the rise of Asia and the fate of Western hegemony. Reviewing history’s ‘hyperpowers’, from Persia and Rome to Britain and the US, she made the migration-friendly argument that the key to world power is not geography, military or economy, but tolerance. Hyperpowers draw on all talents. ‘Tolerance… has always been the true secret to America’s success, and today, more than ever before, we are in danger of losing our way’ (p. xvii).

In Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother the whole story becomes the trials and tribulations of Chua’s Chinese-American Jewish second generation migrant family. Given the way that in American popular culture, large themes work best when reified as personal narratives—as if in War and Peace, Tolstoy had played out the whole of the 1812 war inside the Rostov’s drawing room—this book might outsell the others.

It is impossible to avoid the impression that Chua hams up the Tiger Mother for the book market, if not for the TV sit-com that will surely follow. ‘Chinese parents can order their kids to get straight As’, she says. ‘Western parents can only ask their kids to try their best’ (p. 51). Eldest daughter Sophia, two years ahead of her classmates in maths and whose keyboard playing takes her all the way to Carnegie Hall, recalls that Chua once said to her during piano practice that ‘If the next time’s not perfect I’m going to take all your stuffed animals and burn them!’ (p. 28).
In another and much quoted scene second daughter Lulu says: ‘I wish I had a pet’. ‘You already have a pet’, snaps her mother. ‘Your violin is your pet’ (p. 65)

And then there is Chua’s final verdict on the family dog: ‘I had revised my dreams for Coco—I just wanted her to be happy. I had finally come to see that Coco was an animal, with intrinsically far less potential than Sophia and Lulu. Although it is true that some dogs are on bomb-squads or drug-sniffing teams, it is perfectly fine for most dogs not to have a profession or even any special skills’ (p. 109).

As the book unfolds it is less about Chinese parenting and education and more a tragi-comedy about cross-cultural issues and that old standby, the dysfunctional American family. Unlike most movies on that theme the breach is not quite healed at the end. The recalcitrant Lulu spits the dummy in public fashion in a Moscow restaurant. ‘I know—I’m not what you want—I’m not Chinese! I don’t want to be Chinese… I hate the violin. I hate my life. I hate you, and I hate this family!’ (p. 205). The violin is dropped when she is on the brink of greatness. Making her own choice for the first time, she switches to tennis, and is rocketing up the improvement curve as the book signs off. Chua sighs about her loss of control but we are left with the idea that if the kid can drive herself as hard as her tiger mum had done, all may yet be well.

Secret of global power?

Lighting rod books, and the reactions to them, tell us something about the times. Some readers will find in Chua’s high octane parenting and her daughters’ accelerated learning a story about the rise of China and the shadow on US hegemony (though Chua herself, loyal to the US Ivy League, has little respect for mainland Chinese education).

But education is not the key to hyperpower any more than is tolerance. There is no single key to world leadership except Graeme Richardson’s dictum: ‘Whatever it takes’.

Power is a relation not a content. Global power is situation determined and always rests on a combination of factors. Each of history’s hyperpowers has been exercised in distinctive ways. If a nation doubles its R&D budget it does not suddenly morph into a cauldron of economic innovation. Economies are hard-wired by capital investment, not by cultural capacity waiting to be used. The educational takeoff in East Asian nations typically occurred after 15 years of high growth, as the services sector kicked in. R&D and human capital are necessary but not sufficient conditions for long-term prosperity.

Nevertheless education has other purposes in emerging nations, more powerful than its economic functionality. It is a machine for social sorting that is indispensable to Asian governments as a means of fair allocation in the face of the bulging claims of an expanding middle class. It also shapes people, and it regulates their freedoms.

In East Asia continuous growth in the proportion of university graduates within the population is among other things a mode of liberalization. University graduates are culturally and politically savvy and good at asking questions. All else being equal this creates conditions for a more fertile civil society beyond the state than hitherto typical of East Asia. This changes the equation in one party states like Singapore and China, generating feedback and increasing government transparency over time.

Under some scenarios education might advance the conditions for political pluralization but don’t hold your breath. After Tiananmen this is less likely, and China’s government has another kind of education-led social reflexivity in mind. The spread of education allows China to foster the continuing self-transformation of the Party/state machine, without losing central control. It will now be apparent to all that it was trite to dismiss this regime as sclerotic. It is very smart: the younger leadership ranks bristle with PhDs. It is not educating China so as to
deconstruct itself like Gorbachev. The meaning of East Asian education lies not in
democratization but in modernization.

Because of the extraordinary dynamism of East Asian education and science global
modernization now has the means to follows more than one path—and we are now in
transition to a multi-polar world, as Patrick Smith says in *Somebody Else’s Century*.

The US will remain the world leader in many domains. But it will cease to be the unipolar
global power it has been since the collapse of the Soviet system in 1989.

We are divided on what this means. Some can sense a world becoming more dangerous.
They would like to slow the rise of China. There’s a whiff of Canute about that. Others
welcome the stupendous lift in human capacity in East Asia, with South Asia and Latin
America to follow. As Smith remarks, ‘we can clash with other civilizations, or we can
converse’ (p. 238). Both West and East have their hawks and doves. At this stage it is
impossible to predict which mood will prevail.

What is certain in that the world is becoming a shared inter-cultural space.

What does all this mean for Australia? The decline in PISA performance is not yet a
catastrophe. If we focus on government schools and strengthen teaching we will push upwards
again. Finland sustains stellar student achievement across the whole population, rich and poor.
Teaching is a highly sought after occupation. The entry qualification is a Masters degree.
Every effort is made to reach under-performers and push academically strong students into the
stratosphere. A very different nation with outstanding student achievement, Cuba, likewise
holds teachers in high regard.

And Australia needs to take knowledge seriously. What we learn is what we can become.
Cynical ideas of university as just a piece of paper, or a sign of status, or an instrument of
personal enrichment, corrode the formation of understanding and imagination. Confucian
societies are also grappling with instrumentalism in education; it is a hot debate in Japan,
Hong Kong and mainland China; but they have more backfill that supports learning. They
have Confucian tradition, and Tiger Mums and Dads.

If we deepen our approach to education and lift our PISA scores it will not head off
emerging Asia. But it will position Australia better for the multi-polar world to be, in which
education shapes not just capacity but identity.

‘I am not a Chinese Mother!’

In a multi-polar space, cultures borrow in all directions. That is the meaning of *Battle
Hymn*, in its self-caricaturing way. For many Western parents it is a touchstone for their own
practices. They will trawl through it, in guilty fashion, for answers to the eternal question: how
can I create a successful child? Thus are best sellers made.

Amy Chua explains (p. 29) that the ‘Tiger Mother’ builds the abilities and confidence of
the child, while postponing the freedom of choice that allows the child to opt out. This makes
the 16-hour days possible. Chua’s methods are harsh, yes—but then, as she says, ‘Western
children are definitely no happier than Chinese ones’ (p. 101). Of course the complete
suppression of child choice is not an option in the West. Too much television, Internet, peer
group. Too many indulgent relatives. Where to then Tiger Mother? Chua’s daughter Sophia
provides a cross-cultural resolution. In the *New York Post* on 17 January she said that she was
grateful that her mother had helped her to push herself to the limit. ‘Everyone’s going to think
that I was subjected to Chinese parenting, but I wasn’t. I went along with it, by my own
choice’.

The choice making individual realizes herself within extrinsic Confucian discipline. A
solution more American than Chinese. Again, it’s perfect for Chua’s market.
But there are other kinds of hybridization between the traditions. Take Li Mei, a rising star at Shanghai’s leading institution devoted to the preparation of teachers, East China Normal University, right at the heart of Shanghai’s educational performance. Dr Li is one of the many academic educators in China who trashes Amy Chua’s book. ‘I am not a Chinese Mother!’ she declares. Li’s own daughter has interests outside study and large areas of freedom. She is also carefully monitored to prevent overwork. But her parent’s expectations are Confucian enough to ensure that she does very well at school.

Novel forms of individuality are emerging in East Asia and Singapore amid Eastern forms of modernization. This is not a simple fertilization of Asian traditions by Western capitalism. Still less is it the global triumph of the American way of life. We are seeing continued cultural mixing but for the first time much of it is taking place on Eastern terms. After 150 years of China and Japan defining themselves as in deficit to the West, Western practices can now be enfolded confidently into Eastern identity without a sense of conflict or loss. Patrick Smith remarks on a ‘nascent self-possession’ in the East (p. 21). This is a turning point. ‘Asia can be modern and still be Asia’ (p. 12).

‘Are Asians evolving an idea of progress that does not arise solely from ours—an idea that might be of use to all of us?’ asks Smith (p. 30). Some Chinese colleagues say ‘yes, of course’ to this. Other colleagues, Japanese and Chinese, say ‘we have our own progress, yes. Why should we be concerned about the progress of anyone else?’

So we are all modern but we are still different. Personal pathways are not the same in China or Korea as in Australia or the United States. In East Asia the new self-determining individual makes a life against the background of strong family ties, and other elements less familiar to us. East Asian states of Confucian lineage are not the limited liberal state of John Locke and Adam Smith. They are all embracing all surviving states which routinely sustain arguments within their own ranks but come down heavily on all dissent expressed as a challenge from outside.

In East Asia there is also a stronger sense of common local public space, not dissimilar to the early civic tradition in the United States (Hilary Clinton’s imagined village), with less of the ‘but-what-about-me’ that is such an unattractive feature of later Western culture. In the East there might be a thicker productivity in work and school and home, though it falters in Japan. And there is a certainty that the East is rising, something you can almost taste in the air of the principal cities in China.

The point about East Asian education is that this potent container is incubating much of our global future. Not only is East Asia changing, so are we. After a long period of one-way global flows, we now have a multi-polar world in which Eastern and Western elements are shaping each other in a reciprocal process. ‘To remain the same, to remain unfertilized by others, is not among our alternatives’ says Patrick Smith (p.229). We are going to be transformed. We don’t yet know how. No doubt Tiger Mothers will part of the mix—though, one suspects, the soft toys will still be intact.

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ATTACHMENT 3

Source Publications

Books


Chapters


**Articles**


MARGINSON, S. - Higher education and global public good(s). *Dialogue*, published by the Academy of Social Sciences Australia [to be published 2011]