



The Quiet Global Revolution of Elite Private Higher Education

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In the past half-century and especially since the new millennium, there has been a small but remarkable development of high-quality nonprofit private universities, especially in the Global South. These universities are especially important in the changing landscape of global higher education. They are providing new ideas about the organization, curriculum, and even the philosophy of higher education in countries where academic institutions are often very traditional and bureaucratic. These universities, often supported by substantial philanthropic efforts, have significant resources and have been able to attract top students and faculty.

The Map of Elite Private Universities

The elite private sector is small—perhaps 150 worldwide. The largest number are in the United States, with perhaps half the total, and a few in countries such as Japan and South Korea. Some Latin American countries host top Catholic universities and a few others. But the largest growth area for top private institutions is now the Global South.

There have been several periods of development for these universities. At the end of the nineteenth century, wealthy capitalists in the United States sponsored newly invented German-style research universities in an effort to strengthen the country's scientific capacity. Stanford University, the University of Chicago, and Johns Hopkins University, among others, were established and quickly became elite institutions. Waseda University and Keio University were founded in Japan with similar missions.

The Emergence of Elite Private Universities in the Global South

A few elite private universities were established in the mid-twentieth century. Examples include the Tecnológico de Monterrey (Monterrey Tec), established in 1943 in Mexico by industrialists. A decade later, the Manipal Academy of Higher Education was founded in India, followed by the Birla Institute of Technology and Science. These pioneering universities now have multiple campuses in India and are among the best and most innovative national institutions. In the following decades, additional innovative universities were founded. Symbiosis International University in Pune, India, was established in 1971 as an internationally focused institution, and the Pohang University of Science and Technology (POSTECH) was founded in 1986 in South Korea. INSPER, an independent university in Sao Paulo, Brazil, focusing on business, economics, and (later) engineering was founded in 1987. LUMS University (formerly Lahore University of Management Science) in Pakistan, founded in 1984, grew from a management training institution to a comprehensive university. There were a small number of additional universities founded during this period in other countries.

All of these institutions were founded with a vision that differed from the standard university ethos. All were committed to excellence and all (with the exception of Symbiosis) were established with considerable private resources and thus the ability, like Stanford and Chicago in the United States, to establish infrastructure, hire highly qualified faculty, and appeal to top students within a short time period. All had strong links with local business and industry. POSTECH was founded by Korea's largest steel company, POSCO, with the goal of providing the country's rapidly developing economy with both research capacity and educated personnel. Similarly, Monterrey Tec founders saw the need for talent in Mexico's most important industrial region, and the founders of Manipal had a similar vision in India's early period of economic growth.

All of these universities share some common characteristics. They have continued to flourish and expand in the half-century or more of their existence. All have expanded

Abstract

In the past half-century and especially since the new millennium, there has been a small but remarkable development of high-quality nonprofit private universities, especially in the Global South. These new “elite” universities in countries like Brazil, India, and some others provide new ideas about higher education. Many are funded by philanthropy and are a new area of private higher education.

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their curricular offerings beyond the founding disciplines—and all have become comprehensive universities. All are nonprofit private universities in countries where most of the top institutions are public. They were established with a clear vision and educational focus, have managed to maintain the original mission over time, and have focused on teaching quality from the beginning. They offer both students and academics significantly better facilities and working conditions than most academic institutions in their countries.

New Initiatives

The twenty-first century brought significant new initiatives in private elite higher education. This development is especially notable in India, where the demand for postsecondary education is immense. India has a very small but highly selective elite public higher education sector (mainly the Indian Institutes of Technology and Management plus a few universities), and thus there is much demand for high-quality higher education from India's rapidly expanding middle class, and great need to support the country's expanding and increasingly sophisticated economy. Several of India's billionaires and other business leaders are concerned with the country's need for top-quality universities and have responded by contributing significant resources to establish new universities with innovative missions. Examples include O.P. Jindal University, founded in 2009 with funds from a steel tycoon; Shiv Nadar University (which recently opened a second university in Tamil Nadu), with funding from a tech billionaire; and Ashoka University, established by a group of business and tech leaders in 2014. A new start-up, Jio University, heavily funded by the Reliance conglomerate, will soon open. These institutions boast impressive campuses and offer several postgraduate and doctoral programs, but so far mainly educate undergraduate students. All have innovative curricula emphasizing liberal arts and pay considerable attention to teaching quality. To date, these new institutions cater mainly to upper-middle-class students who might otherwise choose to study abroad and all charge high tuition fees by Indian standards. Their facilities are superior to all but a few public institutions.

There are perhaps an additional dozen or so similar universities in India, representing a tiny part of India's higher education landscape, but quite influential in terms of introducing new ideas about higher education that may influence other universities.

The idea of philanthropically founded, elite private universities seems less common in the rest of the world. Examples include Habib University, which largely serves undergraduate students with a liberal arts curriculum, established in 2012 in Karachi, Pakistan, and Westlake University, a semiprivate, graduate-only, research university in Hangzhou, China, founded in 2016. Westlake aims to develop a world-class STEM-oriented curriculum.

The Importance of the “New Model”

These “new model,” well-funded, elite private universities are significant additions to the global higher education landscape. Even though there are probably under 50 such institutions in the Global South, they are of great importance. Although each has its own mission, there are some elements common to all. Perhaps most crucial is the fact that these universities reflect a different model in their organization, curriculum, and ethos from other academic institutions in their environment, and thus new ways of thinking about higher education. Among these elements are:

- *Financial backing.* These universities are, in their national contexts, well-resourced due to their establishment by wealthy individuals or businesses.
- *Innovation.* The universities represent new ideas about curriculum, teaching, organization, student affairs, and other aspects of academic life.
- *Excellent facilities.* They have built state-of-the-art campuses that are attractive to students and faculty and permit advanced research and scholarship.
- *Governance.* As private nonprofit universities, these universities differ from the public institutions in their countries in their approach to management and governance, they are often less influenced by national political pressures, and provide a greater degree of academic freedom.

- *Highly qualified students and faculty.* With ample resources, these universities are able to attract top-quality people. Some hire excellent faculty on the international market, while others “poach” the best professors from public universities.
- *Local quality and global orientation.* By offering education comparable to international standards, these universities manage to keep at home many students who would otherwise go abroad for study.
- *English.* Most of these universities use English either as the sole language of instruction and research or as a prominent language.
- *Internationalization.* Links, joint research, collaborative degrees, and other international initiatives are integral to these institutions. Students are often offered an international opportunity as part of their degree program.

Challenges

Most, if not all, of these elite privates depend on revenue from student tuition—and this determines academic programs and future directions. Tuition prices tend to be high, so students from low-income families cannot attend; diversity is limited. Many, such as LUMS in Pakistan, have a robust scholarship program aimed at low-income and rural students, but by and large, the new elite universities remain preserves of wealthy families—indeed this may be one of their attractions. These universities remain mainly undergraduate institutions. Only a few have become research-intensive universities with large graduate programs in the traditional disciplines, although some have highly-regarded professional schools in such fields as business and law. These universities are arguably the best universities in their countries, but at the same time sometimes benchmark themselves against the top global institutions—a rather high hurdle. Despite challenges, these elite private institutions have brought vitality to an often moribund higher education environment in their countries. ▲

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