

of national higher education politics, institutional governance, and practitioners. Building on this characteristic, considerations on locals (individuals with deep experience in their own country) and cosmopolitans (individuals with a broad experience in and a focus on different countries), as introduced by Alvin W. Gouldner in the late 1950s, are revealing. Applying his considerations to higher education research illuminates two latent types of research orientations of academics and institutes, within national research environments. Whereas the cosmopolitans immediately pick up and implement international trends in higher education into their research agenda and initiate international comparative research, the locals usually devote their research to the national context. They also pick up international trends in higher education but are more likely to translate them into national research designs and projects.

The overall data set covers 4,095 publications from the Web of Science for the period 1992–2012.

International comparative research is genuinely more complex in its nature than nationally based research—it has multifaceted national angles, which constitute specifically complex research objects. Furthermore, as we have shown, international comparative articles are often outcomes of international collaborative research teams. Due to the more complex research team dynamics within teams located in different countries, international comparative research often implicates a more time-consuming coordination and costly communication. Hence, it might be difficult for international research teams to publish journal articles within the usual three-year time span of research projects. It might be even more difficult to maintain a research network beyond the project duration and to continue the joint international work. Thus, it seems likely that international research teams may favor anthologies, conference proceedings, and monographs as publication formats.

Although these two rationales point to inherent characteristics of international comparative higher education research, which seem to limit its growth, we also found both a recent increase in international comparisons and a tendency toward the comparison of larger country clusters since 2009. Further research is necessary, which explores whether this growth and the tendency toward larger comparative clusters are affected by political institutions through specific research funding schemes. Furthermore, studies on the communication and publication practices and research

team dynamics of international research teams in interdisciplinary research settings would be desirable.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Both rationales refer to institutional and funding structures of higher education research. Thus, we draw the following policy relevant implications from our analysis: in order to strengthen and promote—and eventually increase—international comparative research projects, longer project periods, or projects with flexible modular options for extensions appear as first-choice means. Beyond that, it is worth considering establishing more systematic capacity building, regarding research designs and steering of international collaborative research projects—e.g., through the exchange with other interdisciplinary and disciplinary research fields, as well as through specific training for early career researchers in higher education research. Moreover, international exchange of higher education researchers should be stimulated (and promoted) from the very beginning of research careers. This—reciprocally—would facilitate the internationalization of higher education research and eventually might facilitate international comparative projects. ■

Academic Ranking of World Universities: Changes in World Higher Education?

YING CHENG

Ying Cheng is executive director of the Center for World-Class Universities and associate professor in the Graduate School of Education, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, China. E-mail: ycheng@sjtu.edu.cn.

In order to find out the gap between top Chinese universities and World-Class Universities, a team led by Professor Nian Cai Liu at the Center for World-Class Universities (CWCU) of Shanghai Jiao Tong University started a project on the benchmarking of top Chinese universities with US research universities, which eventually evolved into the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)—first published in June 2003 and then updated on an annual basis. ARWU is distinguished from other global rankings, for it only uses objective indicators. Its methodology has been kept unchanged since 2004, therefore only substantial progress in academic excellence can help universities

to climb up on the ARWU list. In August 2014, CWCU released the 12th edition. The 12-years of effort provides a unique opportunity to observe the changes of performance of universities and countries over the past decade.

NUMBER OF COUNTRIES HOSTING TOP 500 UNIVERSITIES

The number of countries represented in the 2004 ARWU top 500 rankings was 35. By 2014, this number increased to 42. Four out of seven emerging countries are from the Middle East—including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and Egypt. Saudi universities began to enter into ARWU in 2009, and now this leading country of the Arab world has four universities ranked among the top 500, and two of them even get into top 200. University of Teheran in Iran first entered into top 500 in 2009 and then broke into top 400 two years after. Istanbul University in Turkey and Cairo University in Egypt had been in and out of the ARWU list since 2004; and in 2014 both of them were ranked in the range of 401–500. The three other countries that became hosting countries of the top 500 universities are Slovenia, Malaysia, and Serbia; their universities had been visible in ARWU since 2007, mainly in 2011 and 2012. While it is hard to explain the expansion of countries that have top 500 universities, however, nowadays a lot of countries in the world are keen on having one or several of their universities to appear on global-ranking lists.

It is not surprising that Chinese universities, with strong financial support from the central government of China, have made remarkable progress in ARWU.

THE RISE OF CHINESE UNIVERSITIES

ARWU was started in the context of China's efforts on building world-class universities. Therefore, it is not surprising that Chinese universities, with strong financial support from the central government of China, have made remarkable progress in ARWU. The number of mainland China's universities in the top 500 increased from 8 in 2004 to 32 in 2014. In addition, Tsinghua University, Peking University, and four other mainland Chinese universities are now listed among the top 200, while in 2004 these two universities were in the range of 201–300 and the four others were after the top 300. Taiwan's government launched a similar project for world-class universities (called "Five Year Fifty Billion Plan") in 2005, and its number of top 500 universi-

ties increased to 7 in 2014 from 3 in 2004. As a result, the total number of ARWU top 500 universities from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan reaches 44, second only to the United States. However, none of the Chinese universities have been ranked among the world-top 100 yet.

THE PREPONDERANCE OF THE UNITED STATES AND JAPAN HAS DECLINED

University ranking has been criticized for many reasons, one cause is that ranking is a zero-sum game, because the number of top positions is fixed and a new face always comes at the cost of the disappearance of an old one. When more and more universities from China, the Middle East, and eastern European countries entered into ARWU, the United States lost 14 percent (24 in number) of its top 500 universities during 2004–2014, but its number of top 100 universities remained almost unchanged. Japan might be the country with the greatest regression in ARWU between 2004 and 2014. Japan universities occupied 5 position in ARWU the top 100 and 36 positions in the top 500 in 2004, but in 2014 there were only 3 in the top 100 and 19 in the top 500. Such a result would become more difficult to understand when considering the fact that Japan also introduced programs for supporting its research universities—such as "21st Century COE Program" and "Global 30 Project" in that period.

CHANGES OF WORLD-CLASS UNIVERSITIES

We once defined those universities ranked among world-top 100 as world-class universities. According to this definition, there were 13 new universities attaining the title of world class in 2014. Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium, and Australia all got 2 more world-class universities in 2014 than they had in 2004. On the other hand, both Italy and Austria lost the country's only the top 100 university in the same period. The Sapienza University of Rome dropped out of the top 100 in 2007. University of Vienna fell out of top the 100 in 2006, after its medical section became an independent university. Among those that had been already among the top 100, the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom made the most significant progress over the past decade and moved up from 78 to 53 in 2005—as a result of the merger with the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology—and further to 41 in 2014. The University of Melbourne, in Australia, steadily improved its position from 83 to 44 during 2004–2014.

REFLECTION

Few people would disagree that a top ranking position itself should not be the ultimate goal of any universities or countries. However, with the faith in the role of world-class universities to their home countries and the enormous in-

fluence of global rankings, it is not rare to hear national leaders explicitly stated that the country should have certain number of top universities by a particular time. In 2012, Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, announced that at least 5 of Russian universities should break into the world-top 100 by 2020. Japan's Prime Minister Abe said in 2013 that the country's aim was to have 10 universities in the world-top 100. While the high expectation from the national leaders would usually lead to extra and concentrated investment to selected universities, and some good results must come; the pursuit of higher ranking or more top-ranked universities should not be encouraged until the rankings are based on what a university or a country really wants. ■

The *Times Higher Education* Rankings and the Mysterious “Rise of Asia”

ALEX USHER

Alex Usher is President of Higher Education Strategy Associates, Toronto, Canada. His daily blog on higher education issues can be found at www.higheredstrategy.com/blog.

There are, broadly speaking, three types of rankings in higher education. There are those that are put out by independent agencies which are not connected to a media outlet, such as the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU—also known as the Shanghai rankings) or the new annual rankings from the Middle East Technical University in Turkey. These groups simply post their data on a Web site and leave it to others to interpret. There are also rankings published by media outlets for which the rankings are simply a hook to hang an annual bout of coverage of higher education issues that are largely unconnected to the data itself. Canada's *Maclean's* rankings have always used this format as—to a significant extent—has *US News and World Report*. Finally, there are media rankings, for which the rankings are the story. And here, the *Times Higher Education* rankings lead the way.

The problem with making the ranking the story is that there is a need for a narrative. But good rankings—i.e., rankings that reflect the reality that quality in higher education is something built over decades, not years—simply do not provide a lot of movement from year to year. In the past, for instance, *US News* was (not always fairly) accused of changing its methodology every year, to change the out-

comes in order to create new narratives. *THE* has avoided this kind of chicanery over the past few years, and by and large their rankings have been characterized by a significant level of stability. This puts the paper in something of a quandary: how can rankings drive a narrative when very little changes from year-to-year?

THE RESULTS FOR EAST ASIA

Fortunately for the *THE*, the research-concentration policies of many East Asian governments—such as Project 985 in China, Brain 21 in Korea, and others—have resulted in ever-increasing publication and citation counts for about 20 or so universities in the region. As a result, these institutions have over the years seen a steady rise in their ranking position, which has allowed the *THE* to run a steady series of “The Rise of Asia” stories. Asian universities appreciated the coverage and reciprocated by giving the *THE* a fair amount of business in advertising sales and conference traffic. But when the *THE* ran stories on “The Rise of Asia” in its 2014 rankings, it was acting out of force of habit, rather than a sober analysis of the data.

The evidence for a rise of Asia in the actual rankings table clearly does not lie in the top 50. Tokyo University and the University of Hong Kong were unchanged in their position this year from last. Peking University rose one place and National University of Singapore rose three; but Tsinghua University in China fell one place, and Seoul National University fell six. All told, this is a “no change” for the continent.

Going down from positions 50 to 200 in the rankings, we see a mix of good and bad, at least among East Asian universities. Nearly all the Japanese universities saw double-digit falls in places, as did National Taiwan University and Chinese University of Hong Kong. In Korea, Postech fell six places from 60th to 66th, while Yonsei University fell out of the top 200 altogether. Among East Asian universities that in the previous year ranked between 50 and 200, only two (Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology) rose in the rankings. Offsetting this poor performance to some degree somewhat were the rise into the top 200 of City University of Hong Kong (192nd), Fudan University in China (193rd) and Korea's Sungkyunkwan University (148th). So, while there was a net gain of 2 institutions in the top 200, the average position of East Asian universities fell somewhat. By any sensible measure, this is a mixed picture and not an unequivocal “rise.”

TURKEY RESCUES ASIA

So how then did the *THE* come up with a claim of a “rise of Asia”? Well, the paper does not say so directly in its news coverage, but it was mostly because of Turkey. The