gap between the provision of higher education, the requirements of industry, and the country's economic and social development needs.

Using ASEAN and International Frameworks

Myanmar needs to conform to the requirements of its membership in ASEAN, and utilize its advantages. Aside from increasing regional economic integration, ASEAN, through the ASEAN University Network and SEAMEO RIHED (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization/Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development), has taken a significant number of higher education initiatives that should help its member countries' higher education systems reach regional and international standards. These programs include establishing national qualifications frameworks, which will be referenced to the ASEAN Regional Qualifications Framework by 2018; setting up the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network; and developing an ASEAN Credit Transfer System.

> After 50 years of isolation, neglect, and underinvestment, Myanmar's higher education infrastructure (e.g. buildings, libraries, and laboratories), curriculum, research, and teaching capacity require substantial renovation, investment, and capacity building.

These higher education developments at the regional level do not stand alone. Other bilateral and multilateral higher education engagements also provide support for capacity development, infrastructure improvement, and guidance in international best practices. However, ASEAN provides a significant and tested framework in line with its policy of narrowing the developmental gap between its member countries, a strong regional basis for higher education cooperation, and a directive to establish not only the ASEAN Economic Community, but also the ASEAN Community, in the near future.

Higher education can be key to supporting the country's economic development and democratic transition. However, legal frameworks must be established and implemented, even if this remains an ongoing process. Support must be given to higher education institutions, especially within the proposed institutional autonomy framework, and universities need to be actively engaged in citizenship education to enhance nation building, reduce internal conflicts, and support the democratic transition. Finally, Myanmar's active engagement in ASEAN higher education initiatives provides support for capacity building, quality enhancement, mutual recognition, and, in time, meeting ASEAN higher education standards. Transparency, inclusion, and good governance remain key factors to improving Myanmar's higher education sector. ∎

Merging and Demerging Education Ministries in Malaysia

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There is little research into the institutional/organizational underpinnings of education systems. Take, for example, the frequent phenomenon of mergers and demergers of education ministries. Many countries have several ministries of education: one for basic and secondary education (sometimes even one for each); another for higher education; yet another for vocational education. Over time, these ministries are merged, demerged, and reconfigured with sufficient frequency to provide ample meaning to the quote "it's déjà vu all over again" (and again and again).

Even though ministerial mergers and demergers are fairly common and pose similar challenges to all concerned, we were surprised to find only one study (in Zimbabwe) that directly addresses the issue. Studies on the reorganization of government structures are plentiful, but they do not address the particular issues of merger/demerger in education. And yet the abilities of education systems to meet expectations can be cruelly dependent on their organizational capabilities. In education, in particular, policy usually ends up being evaluated as implementation, and implementation is the work of organizational structures at all levels.

Malaysia: A Case Study

In Malaysia, the ministry of higher education (MoHE) was

created in 2004 in order to promote significant growth in higher education, which is what happened: enrollments grew by 54 percent and the gross enrollment ratio increased from 28 percent to 37 percent between 2005 and 2012. Malaysian universities are autonomous for budgetary and most academic matters, but overall enrollments and the level of staff salaries are outside of locus of full university autonomy.

The ministry of education (MoE) and the MoHE were merged in 2013. The reasons provided included: spurring the transformation of education to be on par with international standards by 2020; progress toward one administrative roof for the whole system; harmonization of education strategic plans; improved strategic management of the education system. Two years later, in 2015, the single ministry was again divided into its two previous components, the MoE and the MoHE. This was justified by claiming that separation would allow the MoHE to better focus on empowering higher education in order to meet the rising demands of its institutions. According to senior staff at both ministries, the 2013 merger and the 2015 demerger were politically motivated and unexpected—all interviewed stated that both decisions took them by surprise.

The merger lasted for only two years and its effects were minimal. Three factors account for this: (i) the important functions of accreditation and examinations supervision are performed by autonomous agencies and, thereby, are insulated from ministerial institutional changes; (ii) university autonomy, which insulates the universities from politically motivated vicissitudes; and, of course (iii) the short duration of the merger—if it had lasted longer, the effects would have been greater and a subsequent demerger more difficult. Nonetheless, efforts were made toward consolidation of the two ministries, especially during the second year after the announcement of the merger.

The Merger as Seen by Ministerial Staff

Notwithstanding the unexpectedly short duration of the merger, staff of the two former ministries gave serious thought to its implementation and to potential benefits and costs. Staff from the former MoE perceived the benefits as follows: facilitation of information-sharing, resulting from improved ease of obtaining advice from university faculty and researchers; economies of scale in human resource management; and sharing of infrastructure. On the other hand, MoE staff saw several potential problems associated with the merger: the renegotiation of some international agreements to include higher education; the difficulty of budget planning; confusion resulting from the (presumably short-term) duplication of human resources, accounting, and legal departments during the merger period; and loss of exclusive focus on K-12 education.

For the MoHE, the merger provided one major advantage—coincidental and unintended, according to all interviewed—which was that it greatly enhanced the formulation of its ten-year strategic plan (*Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025*). The short merger period facilitated this by allowing for: improved access to information; a better understanding of the complexities of the basic education system as a whole; a broader ownership of the higher education *Blueprint*; the identification of overlapping activities, such as technical and vocational education and training; and the definition of key performance indicators.

On the downside, according to MoHE staff, decision chains lengthened and the merged ministry was perceived as too big and difficult to manage. There were too many meetings, leading to greater stress. Most importantly, the budget for higher education declined under the merger.

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The merger also highlighted the very different institutional cultures of the two ministries. For example, decision-making processes in the MoHE were more flexible and informal than those of the MoE; information and decisions in the MoHE tended to circulate more as soft copies, whereas the MoE used hard copies; and MoHE staff were often on secondment from other (usually university) positions and/or on limited-term contracts, meaning that there was more staff turnover in the MoHE than in the MoE.

Conclusion

Both the 2013 merger and the subsequent 2015 demerger were politically motivated and came as a surprise to all frontline actors in the ministries. Little organizational change occurred during the two years of the merger period, with the first year mostly spent on getting to know new areas, procedures, and staff, and the second year on working toward implementation. In the event, all agree that the merger did not change much; however, if it had continued for a longer period, reversal would have been difficult and painful. Also, there was broad agreement that management was smoother and more efficient before the merger, and improved again after the demerger.

We found no clear, unambiguous support for the merger. One benefit that surprised senior staff working on higher education was that the merger facilitated the formulation of the higher education ten-year strategic plan. However, now that the *Blueprint* has been completed and adopted, those concerned find that separation is preferable for implementation and focus.

The potential institutional instability resulting from the merger (or, for that matter, from any reorganization of government structures) was mitigated by the existence of autonomous agencies performing major functions, as well as by the fact that the universities are autonomous.

Perhaps the most surprising finding of our work is the near-total absence of any systematic analysis of the frequent phenomenon of ministerial mergers and demergers in the sector of education. Does this lack of interest constitute a recognition that mergers/demergers are of little consequence, or, rather, does it point to a general lack of concern for the institutional, organizational, and managerial dimensions of the sector? The latter would be highly worrisome given the developmental, social, financial, and political importance of the education sector. ■

Christian Higher Education's Place within Private Higher Education

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PROPHE (Program for Research on Private Higher Education) has a regular column in *IHE* and occasionally a Special Focus topic with multiple articles. This issue's topic is Christian Higher Education.

As many *IHE* articles over recent years testify, private higher education (PHE) has grown immensely worldwide. Although most of the articles have dealt with PHE rather generically, others have focused on some particular type of PHE. This Special Focus section highlights Christian higher education (CHE). The section's geographical coverage is broad, as both this introductory piece and Glanzer's piece are global in scope, and Carpenter's is regional (Africa).

CHE in this Special Focus refers mostly to contemporary growth, international settings, and Protestant as well as Catholic institutions. (Orthodox Christianity has not much joined the move into higher education.) Although the Special Focus pieces find variation within CHE (by region, country, and institution), they also identify enough defining CHE realities to make CHE a viable category for analysis.

To open the Special Focus section, this introductory piece places CHE within the context of PHE. More specifically, it indicates how CHE is a type of "identity" PHE. By far the most common form of identity presence in higher education is religious, though ethnic and women's colleges also have a presence. In the nineteenth, and late into the twentieth century, the growing religious type was often Catholic. But the Protestant component of the contemporary CHE surge augments the pluralist nature of the religious proliferation. (Some echo is heard on the growth of Islamic colleges and universities, though these are often public as well as private and, in any case, are beyond the scope of this Special Focus.)

The coherence of the CHE category manifests itself in two vital elements at the forefront of each of this Special Focus's articles: growth and challenges.

GROWTH
Like other identity institutions, CHE institutions emerge to foster the interests of a group. There is a strong promotional side, but also often a defensive side, as a secularizing society and higher education system threaten (intentionally or not) the religious presence in higher education. Even a majority among the general population may find itself only a small minority force in a country's public higher education sector. The religious motivation for growth may be rather narrow, or broadened to include social missions such as serving the poor. Alongside distinctly religious motivations, however, religious higher education institutions sometimes grow from dynamics found also in PHE's nonidentity sectors. From their outset, most religious institutions declare academic missions as well. Over time, CHE institutions seek to build enrollment for the tuition it brings, while governments push them to help expand higher education access. On the other hand, some academically and socially privileged CHE institutions grow as students escape the political and other problems that plague the public sector in many countries. Thus, in CHE as in identity institutions generally, growth comes from a combination of distinctive group causes and nondistinctive causes, seen elsewhere in PHE.

"Academic drift," that common higher education reality in which institutions ascend in their level (including ascension upward into higher education), plays itself out in vivid form in CHE. Seminaries or other institutions training religious leaders and concentrating on theology, become universities offering nonreligious fields alongside religious ones. The motivation may be to reach out to soci-