

## Asian Students Have More Opportunities at Home

by Robert Sedgwick  
Editor, WENR

**A**lthough foreign-student enrollments at U.S. institutions of higher education rose 5.1 percent last year to reach a total of 481,280, the increase followed a more decisive four-year trend of negligible growth.

All together, the American share of the foreign-student market has shrunk from 40 percent in the 1980s to about 30 percent today, leading many to conclude that the United States is losing ground to competitors.

More than half of all international students attending American colleges and universities are Asian, with Japan, China, South Korea, India and Taiwan representing the top countries of origin. Furthermore, the Institute of International Education reports that Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea and Thailand accounted for 17 percent of the total number of foreign students enrolled in the United States in 1996-97, before all four of those countries plunged into economic turmoil.

So while the Asian crisis did not precipitate the kind of drastic decline in foreign enrollments many higher-education professionals were fearing, it nevertheless sparked concerns about the future of America's preeminent standing in international education.

When attempting to account for the recent downslide, most experts tend to limit their inquiries to the following:

- 1) The implementation of tougher U.S. immigration laws making it more difficult for foreigners to obtain student visas.
- 2) Increased competition from the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia.
- 3) The absence of a national policy in the United States for re-

cruiting foreign students.

These are all factors that have certainly contributed to the drop in overall foreign enrollments during the past five years or so. However, few people are addressing the expansion of local systems of higher education in the Asian countries themselves as a potential challenge to U.S. dominance in the international education market.

Are more Asians staying at home to study as opportunities increase to earn degrees and certificates from local institutions?

### Expansion of Asian Higher Education

Growing prosperity in many Asian countries has largely served to boost the demand for higher education throughout the region. In 1990, the number of Asian students

enrolling on campuses at home, while improving the quality of education.

Unlike Americans, who enroll in semester or year-abroad programs for the overseas experience, the vast majority of Asians who pursue higher education in the West do so out of necessity — because there is no local provision. But if they can get quality education at home and save money at the same time, why go abroad?

Indeed, Asia currently has one of the world's fastest growth rates for higher education. In Malaysia, for example, the number of students earning degrees locally increased from 37,840 in 1985 to 89,680 in 1995.

The government is aiming to make higher education accessible to three out of every 10 students

## Increasing prosperity in many Asian countries has largely served to boost the demand for higher education throughout the region.

seeking university places was 17 million. IDP Education Australia, the country's official overseas recruitment agency, predicts this figure will reach 45 million by the year 2010.

Overcrowding and lack of facilities at local universities have traditionally forced many Asians to go abroad for higher education. The exodus of students, many of whom do not come back, has impacted negatively on the region's economies. As a result, more and more Asian governments are undertaking measures to curb the outflow of brainpower and foreign exchange by finding new and innovative ways to expand enroll-

by the year 2000, an increase from the current undergraduate ratio of one out of 10. Each local university will attempt to expand its enrollments to 20,000 by the new millennium.

Japan, South Korea, China and India together turned out twice as many bachelor's degrees in science and engineering as did the United States in 1990.

India has more than doubled its enrollments since 1975, and in the early 1990s, new colleges and universities sprung up all over Singapore and Hong Kong. The Chinese government is likewise trying to pack more students into colleges and universities by overhauling

the country's system of higher education.

In the mid-1980s only 2 percent of students in Hong Kong could find places at local universities. But with the expansion of public higher education, this figure rose to 18 percent by 1995-96, more than double the percentage in 1989-1990.

### Private Sector Provision

In several Asian countries, the private sector has also responded to the overflow of students by offering innovative alternatives in the form of twinning programs, institutional link-ups with foreign universities, credit-transfer programs and distance-learning programs. Although these programs can be found throughout Asia, they have become especially prevalent in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore and Thailand in recent years.

The proliferation and success of private institutions are such that, in some countries, they even outnumber the state-run schools.

In Indonesia, for instance, there are more than 1,000 private institutions compared to the country's 61 public universities, while about three-quarters of all colleges offering general education in India are privately run.

The percentage is slightly higher for South Korea, and even China — which has long resisted the trend — is allowing the private sector to play a greater role in higher education.

While the private supply of higher education is still in its initial phases of development, it has nevertheless proven to be a viable and more-affordable alternative to the traditional study-abroad option.

Graduate programs are also expanding. As recently as a decade ago, many countries in Asia were forced to send the vast majority of their graduate students overseas because they did not have the pro-

grams or facilities to accommodate them. And while Asian students will continue to rely heavily on the West for advanced degrees in the foreseeable future, many countries in the region are in the process of developing their own master's and doctorate programs.

"There are many more possibilities for Asians in their own countries now, particularly at the graduate level," said Peggy Blumenthal, vice president of educational services at the Institute of International Education in New York.

"Students who received their training in the United States are back in their home countries today, initiating and running graduate programs of their own."

In Thailand, for example, young scholars who were educated abroad returned home and pressed the government to establish links

Take Japan, for example, which has traditionally been an exporter, rather than importer, of overseas students. The government is preparing to enroll more than 100,000 foreign students by the year 2001. Approximately 90 percent of all foreign students enrolled at Japanese institutions of higher education are Asian.

The top countries of origin are China (43.2 percent), Korea (24.1 percent), Taiwan (10.5 percent) and Malaysia (4.2 percent).

While 77 percent of all Japanese overseas students went to the United States for higher education in 1994, China was the second destination of choice (with 5,055 students), beating out the United Kingdom, France and Australia.

At the same time, Malaysia is luring students away from China while the Singapore government is currently aiming for a 20-percent

## "There are many more possibilities for Asians in their own countries now, particularly at the graduate level."

— Peggy Blumenthal

between local schools and institutions overseas. In many instances, they set up such programs themselves.

In the late 1980s and early 90s, the spectacular economic growth rate in Thailand encouraged the Ministry of University Affairs to push for the "internationalization" of the country's system of higher education. Such initiatives mainly took the form of increased cooperation between Thai and foreign institutions.

### Inter-Regional Exchange

In addition to more higher education opportunities being provided locally, intra-Asian student mobility has also increased during the past couple decades.

foreign enrollment at local universities.

Singapore also awarded large numbers of scholarships to Chinese students to study engineering at national universities. Both universities in Singapore and private Malaysian institutions have had remarkable success attracting international students from the region because they use English as the language of instruction. India and the Philippines, which also use English to a large degree, are up and coming in this respect.

### Asians Keep Coming West

Despite this expansion of local provision, however, there is still a strong tendency among Asian stu-

*Continued on page 11*

signed for students who wish to pursue a career in academia and research. The length of study is at least two years after the *bakalavr*. The field of study must be the same as for the *bakalavr*. (Because most students continue after the *bakalavr* at the same institution, they may not receive the actual *bakalavr* diploma).

**Specialist:** This is a professional training program designed for students who choose to pursue the practical applications of their specialization. The degree can be earned in one of two ways:

a) Upon completion of at least 1.5 years of study after the *bakalavr*. (Students who earn the diploma of specialist this way often do not get their actual *bakalavr* diploma.)

b) Upon completion of four to six years of study

after the *attestat o srednem polnom obshchem obrazovanii* (this is the unchanged Soviet diploma of specialist). The degree grants professional qualification in engineering, teaching, economics, etc.

*Bakalavr*, *magistr* and specialist diplomas are awarded by the State Attestation Commission.

The Law on Education does not address any changes to the Soviet model of graduate education (the *kandidat nauk* [Candidate of Science] and *doktor nauk* [Doctor of Science]).

A database of higher education institutions in Russia can be found at the following Web site: [www.informika.ru/eng](http://www.informika.ru/eng) (choose the "databases and references" option). Information provided for the institutions includes address, fields of study offered and legal status (state, private, accredited, etc.).

## ASIAN STUDENTS, *continued from page 9*

dents to gravitate towards western universities. The region still remains the world's largest exporter of students. This trend has not been stymied to any significant degree by the economic recession that has racked Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea and Thailand during the past two years.

"Even though families have been hard hit by the crisis, they are still scraping the money together to send their children to the United States to study," Blumenthal said. "They know the value of a good education."

Jason Tan, a lecturer in the division of public policy and management studies at the National Institute of Education, Singapore, contends that large numbers of Asian students are still being driven overseas for a variety of reasons.

"On the one hand, you have political instability in Indonesia, which is scaring away ethnic Chinese," Tan said. "Then in Malaysia, the government's unanticipated decision to recall scholarship holders from overseas has resulted in overcrowding of existing local campuses, which are already struggling to cope with planned enrollment increases. Hence, some students are dissatisfied with cam-

pus facilities and decide to search for better alternatives elsewhere," Tan added.

And thirdly, "The inability to gain admission to desired courses or the unavailability of certain courses in local universities still pushes some students overseas."

In fact, enrollments at both of Singapore's national universities dropped significantly in 1993 due to more students going abroad for higher education. Many degree and certificate seekers find west-

countries, it appears that demand for higher education throughout the region continues to outstrip supply. But according to some education professionals, Asians no longer have to go abroad to study just because they can't find university places at home.

"At least part of this demand is satisfied by franchise provisions, distance education and Internet offerings provided by U.K., Australian and U.S. programs within the Asian countries themselves,"

### According to some education professionals, Asians no longer have to go abroad to study just because they can't find university places at home .

ern universities more accessible because their programs offer greater flexibility and can be completed in a shorter period of time. Far from frowning on the outflow of students, the government actually encourages overseas study because of the long-term economic benefits it brings to the country when those students return home.

So while local provision is indeed expanding in many Asian

said Hans de Wit, vice-president for international affairs at the University of Amsterdam. "This is clear in countries like Hong Kong and Singapore, and might also be the case in Taiwan. Moreover, the financial crisis has made that even more of an alternative. One can stay at home, keep working and study via the Net, in distance education or in a franchise program."

## REGIONAL NEWS, continued from page 7

thing) passed a law in December 1997 that affects the country's University College of Education. Under the new legislation, the College for Pre-School Teachers, the College of Physical Education and the College of Social Pedagogy are currently merging with the existing University College of Education.

The objective behind the merger is to improve professional teacher training programs in Iceland at all levels from preschool to university. The revamped University College of Education is scheduled to commence classes for the 1999 fall semester with a new curriculum.

— *Le Magazine*  
1998, Issue 9

### SWEDEN

■ To help meet the rising demand for higher education, the government is creating 68,000 new tertiary places, which represent a 30-percent increase over the current number of places available. From 1997 through 1999, 16,000 new places per year are being made available for qualified students. This number is expected to

reach 20,000 by the year 2000.

In addition to expanding undergraduate education, the government has also increased funding for research at colleges and universities. Beginning this year, three of Sweden's 26 state colleges are being granted university status.

— *Le Magazine*  
1998, Issue 9

### UNITED KINGDOM

■ The University of Sheffield has become the world's first major accredited institution to offer a Ph.D. program online. Although other doctoral programs have allowed students to do a large part of their research away from campus, this is the first Ph.D. to be offered entirely in the form of a distance-learning program.

— [www.shef.ac.uk/~gradsch/joinloc.shtml](http://www.shef.ac.uk/~gradsch/joinloc.shtml)

■ Britain recently took steps to become more competitive in the international education market by launching a campaign aimed at recruiting greater numbers of students from Australia.

The project was given impetus when the British Council, a quasi-

official agency responsible for promoting British education abroad, received 6,000 inquiries about study in Britain from its office in Sydney.

Twelve British universities participated in the initial phase of the Australian recruiting mission. The British Council is supporting the campaign by providing academic advisors in Melbourne, Perth and Sydney, in addition to a toll-free telephone information line and an online tour of British higher education available through the council's Web site, [www.Britcoun.org/eis](http://www.Britcoun.org/eis).

With Australian universities now charging fees, British institutions of higher education will attempt to increase their competitiveness by attracting more Australians.

Of the 196,346 foreign students attending British universities last year, only 1,132 were from Australia. The British Council hopes to boost this figure by 70 percent in the next three years.

— *Chronicle of Higher Education*  
March 26, 1999

WENR  
WORLD Education NEWS & REVIEWS

P.O. Box 745  
Old Chelsea Station  
New York, NY 10113-0745



NONPROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
LONE OAK  
MAILING SERVICES