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“Positive Change After 2011 Elections in Asia: A Glimpse into New Policy”

Kenneth Hau, Singapore
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“The government aims to improve energy usage 35% by 2030.”

Last year, Singapore oversaw its 16th Parliamentary election in which its leading political party, the People’s Action Party (PAP), won 81 of the 87 elected seats. The PAP has been in power since elections began in 1959. One of the laws enacted by the new government seeks to address the issue of energy resources. Called the Energy Conservation Act, this legislation was passed on April 9th with a focus on curbing high energy usage by corporations and diminishing their carbon footprint. Under the Act, high energy users in the commercial sector will be appointed an energy manager, required to report energy consumption levels, and submit improvement plans. In addition, all subsequent energy efficiency related laws will be grouped under the Act. Because Singapore is a city-state which lacks natural resources and where all energy must be imported, energy efficiency is a critical matter. The government aims to improve energy usage 35% by 2030. Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, said in Parliament, “We need to focus the minds of corporations and citizens on building and achieving breakthroughs in energy efficiency through more rigorous energy management practices. Otherwise, we will pursue an ultimately unsustainable growth path.”

However, not everyone is on board with the new Act. Some critics lambast it as a weak tool in the fight against greenhouse emission and energy consumption, citing the need for additional punitive laws like carbon taxes. Others argue that rewarding corporations for efficiency rather than punishing them for high usage is more effective. Regardless, this new law represents a positive route for Singapore in meeting international environmental responsibilities and allows the streamlining of efficiency related legislation for a more cohesive approach to mandating energy requirements.

Evelyn He, Thailand
Fu Foundation School of Engineering
Master of Science, Civil Engineering 2012

It has been half a year since Yingluck Shinawatra, Thailand’s first female prime minister, won the general election of 2011. As a member of the populist Pheu Thai Party (PTP), the public’s support has been high her first six month. Thailand’s new 35-member cabinet in which 29 members are from the new prime minister’s victorious Puea Thai Party committed to the development of Thailand’s economy - the better the economic development, the better the people’s lives, and the higher the support for the government.

Mme. Shinawatra will accomplish her political agenda in three steps: improve personal incomes by increasing the minimum wage to $10 a day, in addition to completing the social security system. Second, increase government investment to protect disadvantaged groups by providing technology products to all school children and increase funding for infrastructure projects. Third, implement tax preferential policies to stimulate economic growth, for instance, reducing urban rail transit fees to 20 baht (0.65 USD).

With rising inflation due to the recent flood crises as well as the higher fuel prices worldwide, every 10 percent increase in oil price boosts the consumer price index by 0.3-0.4 of a percentage point. In the face of rising costs for consumer goods, Mme. Shinawatra initiated the “Blue Flag” program. The program’s goal is to open Blue Flag shops that sell state-sponsored economically-priced food products in depressed communities. These shops are calibrated to sell a full plate meal at no more than 25 baht (0.81 USD).

In the light of Thailand’s “World News” reported on March 6, the Thai Prime Minister presided over the work of the government strategic policy meeting and implemented 10 important policies. She requested the State Council to track every specific plan made by each of the ministries to manage its relevant progress of the project. Furthermore, she asked each department to compile a summary report to be sent to Cabinet each month. In the past two years, Thai people suffered a volatile political system as well as the global financial crisis. Lower living standards alongside higher unemployment shed light on the perils of Thailand’s economy. The new government is hoping to return to its former glorious period when Thailand was leading the ASEAN.
Andrew Hill, Japan
School of International and Public Affairs
Master of International Affairs, 2013

On March 10, 2011, a devastating earthquake and tsunami hit eastern Japan, and in their aftermath, unleashed a cascade of challenges upon the Japanese people and their government. In the wake of the devastation, Japan lost over 15,000 people; entire villages vanished from the map; and an as-of-yet unresolved nuclear catastrophe unfolded. Though the loss and destruction took a serious toll and will take many years to overcome, the nuclear crisis that has had significant and palpable effects is a new and pressing issue for Japan. Fearing the possibility of additional meltdowns, Japan systematically shut down every nuclear reactor in the country.

In May, the last of Japan’s 54 reactors will go idle, and the country will be without nuclear power for the first time in over 40 years. This is no small matter; over 30% of Japan’s power supply was derived from nuclear reactors before the disaster. But many in the country fear a return to nuclear energy, and have made their voices heard at large protests in Osaka and Tokyo. Furthermore, many companies, including Kyocera, Softbank, and Mitsui have constructed massive solar plants in Osaka and Yamanashi prefecture, or announced plans for construction in Hokkaido, Tottori, Kagoshima, Kawasaki City, and Miyagi prefecture, which was at the heart of the tsunami’s devastation.

Will the Japanese find a viable alternative to nuclear energy? Japan’s stagnant economy gives credence to the skeptics, but when one considers Japan’s past, the breakneck speeds at which the country modernized and came to compete with the great powers of the West, as well as the postwar recovery that made the country an economic powerhouse, one thing is certain: if anyone can overcome such adversity, it will be the Japanese.
Japan is now approaching its one-year mark after a staggering 8.9 magnitude earthquake struck the northeastern coast on March 11—a catastrophic disaster that triggered a massive tsunami wave, leaving an enormous death toll. Among one of the five most powerful earthquakes ever recorded, the earthquake set off an unanticipated chain of events, destroying homes and buildings and wiping away entire towns and cities. The earthquake unfolded another debilitating and long-term problem of a nuclear crisis followed by leaks of radioactive material from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. The triple disaster of the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear crisis left Japan with immense implications. As Japan has been tackling the mammoth task of reconstruction, it is likely that they will face significant challenges and hurdles while on its road to recovery.

It is difficult to assess the full scope of economic damage the earthquake has had on Japan as well as the ripple effects that are being felt around the globe, but it is apparent that this natural calamity has had painful and costly effects that will take a long time to overcome. The earthquake struck Japan at a time when the nation was already burdened with economic problems including a two decade long recession, a rapidly aging society, a soaring yen, and bulging public debt. Meanwhile, the strong yen continues to impede the country’s export sales and contract its economy, as Japan hit a record trade deficit this January of 1.48 trillion yen. To make matters worse, its economic problems have been compounded by frequent political deadlock and bickering among divided parties, leading to stifled decision making processes and discord among policy makers. Thus, Japan has had intense difficulty in directing its focus to reconstruction under deep rifts in political parties, bleak financial forecasts and severe fiscal restraints. Building a framework for cooperation in the government and strengthening economic ties with other nations have become all the more important and necessary to rejuvenate Japan’s lethargic and sagging economy and eventually bring its public finances under control. Liberalizing trade, pushing for tax hikes, which requires achieving cooperation among political parties and policy makers are essential steps to restore Japan’s embattled economy and speed the process of its recovery.

Despite the challenges that lie ahead, there is a strong sense of hope and optimism that Japan will rise once again and will eventually overcome the tragedy that terrorized the nation last year. An important reason for this is due to the blossoming of volunteering facilities and support from within Japan and from abroad in helping to mend the torn communities and rebuild cities that were destroyed by the disaster. As Professor Gerald Curtis, Burgess Professor of Political Science at Columbia University shared, the “Japanese rightfully credit the people in Tohoku and not the government for being law abiding and orderly, and for doing so much to take care of themselves and each other.” The horrific aftermath of the earthquake shone light on the resilience, perseverance and strength of familial and community bonds of the people of Tohoku and of the Japanese as a whole. People of various age groups gathered at volunteering activities, solidified under a single goal to help...
While the unprecedented development of Asian economies receives nearly constant popular attention, the relationship between economic growth and the role of higher education in those nations only recently began to take center stage. In the past, universities in Asia emerged with little fanfare. Today, as a result of targeted government policies, those same universities frequently shoulder expectations regarding the future of Asia’s rapid economic rise. The lack of clarity regarding the efficacy and legitimacy of higher education development initiatives, however, threatens to undermine goals across the region and universities themselves.

During the last fifteen years, governments across Asia have devoted significant resources to driving improvements in their higher education sectors. From 1995 to 2003, the Chinese government directed more than $6.1 billion through Project 211 and Project 985 toward the country’s elite educational institutions in order to catapult them into the upper echelon of the world’s universities. In Korea, the Brain Korea 21 (BK21) project, begun in 1999 and concluding its second phase this year, aimed at developing “world class” universities, research and human resources capacity, and international competitiveness through the investment of about $3.3 billion. A similar 2008 Japanese program, the Global 30 Project, emphasized the importance of internationalizing the top thirty universities in Japan to promote global competitiveness and attractiveness to young talent. Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan have also pushed projects utilizing higher education for economic development.

The concept of higher education as a tool for stimulating economic development has never garnered more support in Asia than now. Why do these projects all highlight an increasingly common set of themes, including the “global knowledge economy,” “world class universities” and “global competitiveness?”

One major impetus behind the emphasis on higher education for economic development involves the propagation of standards through reports and conferences by the international community. The recent World Bank publication Putting Higher Education to Work: Skills and Research for Growth in East Asia serves as a powerful example of how norms embedded in reports drive the inclusion of higher education in Asian economic development strategies. The document repeatedly stresses the importance of “high-level skills” as a key to succeeding in the “competitive global economy,” pointing to low international rankings as unsatisfactory report cards for East Asian universities and calling for government-led reform. The report’s title itself quite explicitly promulgates the responsibility of higher education to serve as an impetus for economic development.

Increasing academic competition around the world further encourages the funding of universities for development, a phenomenon popularized by global university rankings. These lists, published annually by the Times Higher Education, QS and the Shanghai Ranking Consultancy, invoke the pride of universities and incite them to ascend international standings. For governments, the lists also function as indicators of societal economic development. The widespread influence of these rankings, whose methodology focuses heavily on university reputation and research, invariably shapes perceptions of the role universities should play in Asian societies and economies.

Far more telling than the reasons for the adoption of higher education as a centerpiece in economic growth, however, is the relative paucity of critics. Although popular wisdom emphasizes a causal link between higher education and societal economic development, scholarship assessing this link remains inconclusive (for example see Chabott and Ramirez, “Development and Education” in the Handbook of the Sociology of Education). Furthermore, comparisons between elite universities in Asia and the West rarely take into account the fact that the latter were not conceived to motivate economic development. The primary point missing from discourse in policymaking circles is that the intangibles elevating certain universities to international importance are not easily quantifiable, but instead reflect the cumulative impact of historical and cultural factors that may not be easily replicated elsewhere.
Asian Investments in Liberal Arts Education are Bets on the Future

The recent announcement of the opening of a new liberal arts college at National University of Singapore (NUS) in 2013 under the dual NUS-Yale label has raised the interest of the academic and student community, not only in the two concerned universities but also worldwide.

Many experts have already expressed their concerns about the level of academic freedom in Singapore while others have questioned the decision-making process that led a major American university to accept such a venture. The media has mainly addressed the questions of the potential gains and losses for Yale.

Little has been written about the other side of the story. What does this project tell us about the changes in Singapore's higher education and more broadly in Asia? A few important remarks need to be made in order to understand the context: liberal arts education is not new to the Singaporean higher education system. The country built its system between 1980 and 2000 with the idea that it would provide a comprehensive and diversified education. In the attempt to make Singapore competitive in the global marketplace, the government has helped establish a full range of higher education programs and institutions. At the same time, several foreign major universities and business schools have been attracted through financial incentives, leading to the establishment of joint research platforms (with the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) or branch campuses in Singapore (INSEAD, one of the world's largest graduate business schools). Despite the past decade's rapid and deep transformation, undergraduate education has remained specialized, with the exception of medical and law schools. Every year about 20,000 of the best Singaporean students leave the country after high school to pursue a liberal arts education in the U.S., UK, and Australia. The competitiveness and quality of secondary education, the adoption of a multilingual teaching system, as well as a large and generous governmental scholarship system for studying overseas have facilitated the international mobility of Singaporean students.

The system started to change when NUS, based on the successful experience of two small pilot programs tested in 1996, spurred the creation of the University Scholar Program (USP) in 2000. USP brought to Singapore a different undergraduate teaching experience combining independent study and research, broad-based education, strong focus on writing and critical thinking, and a multidisciplinary core curriculum.

Liberal arts education is becoming a trend in the region and Singapore is not an isolated example. Similar initiatives are being undertaken in China, where liberal arts undergraduate education had been abolished after 1949. Engaged in a profound social and economic transformation, the Communist party rebuilt the whole educational and research system following the Soviet Union model. Comprehensive universities were turned into specialized institutions, with priorities in science and technology. One of the most prestigious and historic Chinese universities, Peking University (PKU), launched an undergraduate educational reform program, called the Yuanpei Program in 2001. Like NUS, PKU experimented with a small innovative two-year undergraduate program introducing multidisciplinary education, a core curriculum, and a tutorial teaching method. In 2007 the Yuanpei College was established on a larger scale, but maintained its selectivity and elitism. Since then, almost all the elite universities in China (such as Fudan, Zhongshan, Zhejiang and Wuhan University) have opened special classes or programs, usually limited to the first two years of college, inspired by American liberal arts education.

By implementing these innovations in their local higher education systems, these universities have responded to one of the major concerns of their government: to train a new generation of talented and creative individuals that transforms the national economy to a highly innovative knowledge-based economy.

While reporting the success of such initiatives in China, the Chronicle of Higher Education posited in 2010 “whether liberal education can flourish in a system where political indoctrination is considered part of the educational process,” suggesting that there is a fundamental incompatibility. The freedom of choice and the critical thinking associated with liberal arts education is often perceived as potentially destabilizing for authoritarian or non-democratic regimes. Indeed, the most recent Asian experiences of liberal arts education are taking place in a political and cultural environment completely different from the one that generated the American model. There is no evidence so far that, by introducing the American model of liberal arts education at a larger scale, these Asian societies will transition toward democracy or towards a new set of political values. It is interesting to note that in the two present cases, the trend is strongly encouraged by governments who allocate substantial funding and invest in the new liberal arts college education. At a time when the American model itself seems to be in danger, accused by scholars and think tanks to be financially unsustainable, non-egalitarian, and inadequate in meeting the job market’s qualitative expectations, some of the major Asian countries are taking a different option and betting on their future.
China and North Korea’s long-standing relationship began in the 1940s when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) retained and processed Marxism as its ideological guidance. In the meantime, the northern half of the Korean peninsula was occupied by the Soviets, obeyed the same principles. Therefore both China and North Korea maintained very close relations with their ideological progenitor. The bonds between the two countries grew stronger due to the Korean War (25 June 1950 – 27 July 1953) when Korea was invaded by the United States. Beijing feared that American military presence in Korea would be a threat to neighboring China and took precautions. According to conservative estimates, 900,000 Chinese died in the war including Mao Anying, the most promising of Mao Zedong’s three sons. However, when the Soviet Union collapsed in the earlier 1990s, China and North Korea abandoned the Marxist-Leninist communist principles. Kim Il-Song began to stress North Korea’s independence, the ideological bonds between China and North Korea diminished.

In contrast to Deng Xiaoping, Kim Il-Sung began his own political philosophy known as “Juche”, which refers to the most isolated regime. Other than the Communist principle on which the DPRK had been founded, he adopted an incredibly rigid hierarchy to consolidate his own power by all means, such as the golden statue of Pyongyang; it kept reminding people how great their leader is in terms of fighting against Americans but without even mentioning the Chinese supporting during the war. Kim Jong-II inherited his father’s regime and retained the totalitarian policy of no freedom of speech, no outside media information, and to be a standstill and self-sufficient nation. All of this happened once before during The Great Leap Forward, which resulted in the plummet of the Chinese economy. Whenever visitors come into Pyongyang, they must be supervised at all times. There is a funny tale about two foreign workers complaining that there was no cake shop in Pyongyang. Although they only spoke to each other, both of them received a cake the next morning. With this joke aside, it sheds light on the power of the government. Today the average North Korean is only allowed access to highly censored TV and radio programs, and only the most trusted elites, mainly government officials are allowed to have cell phones, access to the Internet, or to visit other countries. Nonetheless, 99 percent of the public supports the government. From the 1970s to 1990, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) had to rely on foreign aid provided primarily by the Soviet Union to meet the most basic human needs. Because of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, North Korea’s traditional socialist market collapsed, which led to dramatically lowered trade with the Soviet Union and other countries. Moreover, with the death of Kim Il-Sung in 1994, North Korea faced the biggest disaster of its history: Years of natural disaster brought about tremendous financial losses and countless famine. Between 1995 and 1997, two million North Koreans starved to death, but people still believed in their great leader. There is a documentary about a foreign doctor devoted to curing North Koreans who suffered from glaucoma. Due to the rigid foreign policy he had to treat 100 patients in 3 days. In the end, however, all the patients were grateful to Kim Il-Sung rather than the exhausted doctor. Some of them choked with sobs, others piously fell on their knees before the picture of their leader.

After a three year period of mourning, Kim Jong-Il began his administration. He started a series of experimental economic ventures, such as selling arms to foreign militaries. However, none of them contributed to economic revitalization. With a GDP per capita of only $1,800, North Korea ranks 196th out of 230 countries in 2009.

Additionally, Pyongyang’s pursuit of nuclear weapons and its constant provocations against South Korea and the United State estranged itself from the rest of the world. Regardless of whether or not Kim Jong-Il’s threats of nuclear power were real, his declaration did prevent him from...
WRITE-UP: China

LAB 918, 6:00PM March 28, 2012

Professor Jean-Francois Huchet, School of China Studies, National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations, lectured on the future of China’s economy. The Asia Pacific Affairs Council co-sponsored the event with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. Huchet posits that China has been experiencing a repressed financial sector, i.e., negative real interest rates, artificially fixed exchange rates, and an inefficient public sector that harbors more corruption and hinders productivity more than the private sector. Although China has been performing well in the last two decades, there may be some mid to long term growth problems if the role of the state does not evolve. Huchet hypothesized that Chinese leadership is not addressing these issues now because there was a rush of rapid reform in the 90s that has yet to be fully implemented. Furthermore, the state is focusing on social security and environmental issues since there has been a priority of profits over wages. The international community has also been critical of China’s pollution problems. Once the state focuses on economic reform in the future, Huchet predicts there are three possible scenarios of action - business as usual, minimal change with no systemic reform, or bold reform much like Deng Xiaoping in the early 90s. Professor Huchet predicts that reform will be minimal since there isn’t incentive to be bold and China’s economic strength can “steamroll” further into the future.
Cambodia is the product of a tumultuous history that climaxed with the Khmer Rouge's rise to power in the 70's. The Khmer Rouge is primarily known for the devastating famine and genocide that caused the deaths of over 2 million Cambodians during the years it ruled the country. This pervasive devastation was perhaps most apparent in the education sector where it is estimated that over 75 percent of the teachers, 96 percent of the university students, and 67 percent of secondary and primary students were killed. However, after adopting Education For All (EFA) goals, Cambodia has partnered with international aid agencies and achieved unprecedented success in achieving its goals in educational access, gender parity, and net enrollment ratio (NER). Cambodia's success in education is a testament to the increased efforts of the Cambodian government and international aid agencies.

One of the main facets of Cambodia's education reform has been its efforts in social policy. These programs are focused on conditioning the population to achieve a level of tolerance, cohesion, and peaceful co-existence between the government and citizenry. Often, following violent conflict, it is important to engage in social reconstruction and trust building in order to ensure national growth. Cambodia has been able to accomplish this by promoting community-based participation and decentralizing control of education. The basis of this action is that if families have more influence over their children's schools, they are more likely to participate. Additionally, local monitoring and evaluation by parties who are invested in the success of local students and communities help minimize corruption and maximize resources.

In addition to social reconstruction and decentralization efforts in education, Cambodia has implemented and sanctioned conditional cash transfers (CCTs) to impoverished or rural populations. CCTs are effective in increasing enrollment but are often far too costly to be offered by the ministry of education alone. To help with these and other types of costly initiatives, Cambodia has partnered with several NGOs and multilateral aid organizations that participate in enrollment and social reconstruction efforts. Two specific NGOs, American Assistance for Cambodia and Japanese Assistance for Cambodia, have partnered to organize a program called “Girls Be Ambitious” that aims to keep rural girls in school and prevent them from entering the workforce far from home. These girls are highly vulnerable to sex trafficking and other forms of dangerous labor.

With domestic policy through international partnerships, Cambodia has seen remarkable progress in the education sector. Cambodia's immense success in improving NER and gender parity are only two of the many achievements that have resulted from renewed efforts in education after adopting EFA goals. However, it is important to note that this progress has not been made alone. The successful improvement of Cambodia's education sector has been made with significant financial assistance from the Asian...
While China has nearly achieved the goal of ensuring universal access to primary education as the World Declaration on Education For All has demanded, large gaps in the quality of education still exist between urban and rural areas. In particular, rural boarding schools have drawn considerable attention for their reputation of providing lower quality education. This article will examine the quality of education being provided in rural boarding schools in China, using the UNICEF definition of “quality education” as a measure, and will discuss the challenges that the country faces in providing quality education at these institutions.

The emergence of issues related to rural boarding schools can be dated back to the beginning of the 21st century, when the number of school-aged children in China declined dramatically due to the One Child policy. In 2001, the Ministry of Education announced a national policy to “adjust the allocation of educational resources” and improve the quality of education, also known as the ‘Merger Program’. The implementation of the policy often involves shutting down schools in remote areas and merging students into centralized town or county schools. This Merger Program has enormous impacts on rural education in China. From 2001 to 2009, the number of primary schools was reduced by 43%, and boarding schools were expanded primarily to accommodate children who needed long-distance transportation from home to school.

Simultaneously, the central government has made and implemented a series of policies aimed at improving the quality of education for boarding schools in rural areas. In 2004, the Ministry of Education regarded rural boarding schools as barriers to universal nine-year compulsory education and the elimination of illiteracy. Thus there was a three-year program run by the government in order to build and renovate rural boarding schools’ facilities. National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) announced that 13 billion Yuan (1.875 million US dollars) has been invested in rural boarding schools in Center and West China. Additionally, all families under the poverty line began receiving subsidies if their children board at school. That being said, it is also important to investigate to what extent the quality of education has been improved on the local level after the implementation of the Merger Program and the expansion of boarding schools.

Ms. Li Zhang, a doctoral student doing her research in in Shanxi Province observed that after the Merger Program, students indeed enjoyed better resources, including classroom infrastructure, textbooks, and teaching resources. “Students benefit when they transfer from a village school to a more centralized and better school in the county,” Li affirmed. As she collected data of student achievement, however, students who needed to board at school had lower test scores than those who did not. To explain the possible reason, she described her visit in several primary schools where she noticed poorly heated facilities and minimal hot water for showers in winter, given the average temperature in winter is around 20 F. Apart from school facilities, high student-teacher ratio hinders teachers from being able to take care of each child, and with parents moving to big cities for work, familial support is not available for some students.

Nevertheless, the situation is quite different in another county situated 360 km away in the same province. According to Emily Wong, Chief Executive officer of a local NGO, there are positive impacts of the rural boarding schools on boarders’ physical and psychological development. The NGO hires and trains “project teachers”, to work with students after the school day in small groups to continue learning outside of the classroom and provide more support.

In both counties, there has been a positive reception of boarding schools by experts in the field because teaching resources and classroom facilities have improved as result of the merger. After the Sichuan earthquake in 2008 for example, some schools were remodeled to withstand earthquakes. However, a common problem for rural boarding schools is insufficient funding from
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Despite Cambodia’s successes, there still remain obstacles to its progress. Poverty, the rural-urban divide, and poor school-community relationships continue to have a detrimental effect on Cambodia and its educational growth. Furthermore adequate teachers, pedagogy, student-teacher ratios, school infrastructure, and financing continue to stymie efforts to improve the quality of education. However, with continued international support and community participation, Cambodia’s educational future looks promising and success in achieving all EFA goals are attainable.

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the victims and contribute to the recovery of the nation. The volunteer organizations and grassroots participation, not only within the nation but from abroad as well, has had a tremendous effect in the recovery process. For example, the Magokoro relief center, a volunteer facility accommodates long-term volunteers in the Iwate region. Activities range from engaging in actual reconstruction efforts, providing emotional and psychological care, distributing essential materials and goods, and recovering personal items and photographs from the ruins. Everyone in this facility works a 16-hour day: the lights go out at 10 p.m. and come back on at 6 a.m. Volunteer activities continue to help alleviate the immense emotional scar and insurmountable pain and despair of the survivors, and they have played a significant role in speeding up the progress of reconstruction and deepening the bond, or kizuna in Japanese, of communities and between volunteers and survivors. There are many other NGOs, grassroots organizations, and volunteer facilities and fundraising activities that continue to aid the affected regions and work diligently and patiently under a single mission: to restore hope, happiness, and peaceful living in these communities as soon as possible and help alleviate the actual and emotional tolls of the disaster.

The tragedy reminded the world the dangers of unanticipated events and the need to improve preparedness in emergency situations at all times to keep negative implications at minimum when events like the earthquake in the Tohoku region, does occur. The triple disaster that consumed Japan also highlights the need for agile and quick contingency planning by both public and private sectors, and the importance of support from within the country and from abroad to improve and repair the wreckages from different dimensions. There is still a long way for complete recovery but there have been impressive improvements that serve as necessary milestones in the reconstruction progress. Seeds of optimism and hope for recovery and rejuvenation are beginning to sprout and grow in the land of the rising sun.

Development Bank, World Bank, UN Groups and Japan.

recognition cannot simply be reduced to clinical numbers for the sake of comparison. For example, who or what determines what constitutes a ‘world class’ university and which institutions should seek that status? What cues should universities take from local or regional conditions? In promoting a narrow view of higher education development, whether focusing on international reputation or labor market responsiveness, policymakers may in fact be uprooting universities from the very context in which they will thrive. Instead, Asian governments must carefully balance international norms with domestic realities in order to foster universities that remain true to the needs of their own societies.

At their core, universities constitute crucial institutions tasked with dissemination of knowledge and socialization into a common societal framework. Despite diligent efforts to utilize higher education for economic growth, policymakers still fail to understand precisely how, if at all, the purported mechanisms of this process work. While the billions of dollars directed at higher education across Asia serve as an encouraging sign of the recognition of its importance to society, many of the purported goals force domestic universities into international boxes. When daring to make comparisons, it is important to remember that the best universities of today succeeded by redefining, and not merely borrowing, the accepted standards of the day.
NK07: continued from page 10

e external intervention, and his absence from the Six Party Talks hosted in Beijing on denuclearization triggered more controversy towards its attitude of keeping regional stability.

With the sudden death of Kim Jong-Il, a new round of deification is about to start. Kim Jong-Un, the third leader and the new head of the National Defense Commission, took the regime on the day of the first rocket failure.

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the Ministry of Education, local businesses, NGOs and individuals. This has an impact on the student learning experience in many ways. In particular, the facilities at some of the boarding schools are inadequate and overcrowded, which in some cases has caused health problems for the students, especially those who are suffering from malnutrition. Though the government does provide some services and has set standard regulations for the boarding schools, some schools fall short of these standards and therefore fail to meet the needs of the boarders.

Perhaps the greatest impact of the rural boarding school merger is on the student experience. Many students live far away from the schools and are therefore distanced from their families. Many students travel long distances to attend schools, which hinders the level of emotional support families and communities are able to provide. The overcrowding also impacts student wellbeing and student learning. Some students, especially those who have transferred to other village schools perform poorly in math and other subjects in comparison to students who have different transfer paths. The large classrooms also make it difficult for teachers and caregivers to provide individual attention to the students.

Little is known about how these variables impact the overall student experience as there has not been any in-depth study about students’ psychological welfare. Any evaluation will be difficult because the impact on student experience in such schools vary widely, depending on the transfer path, age, socioeconomic status, school facilities, and the level of funding. It is clear the boarding schools do not have a uniform impact on student performance or wellbeing.

China is by no means homogeneous, and the situation of boarding schools cannot be easily generalized from the case in one county or one province. Several groups of scholars are on their way to conducting research in different provinces, and critical challenges in school management, psychological care, and nutrition have been revealed. According to Marry Liu, an education officer from UNICEF, over the next five years, baseline research on rural boarding schools in Yunnan, Guizhou and Guangxi Provinces will be conducted. However, more effort is needed in order to provide the children in rural boarding schools with an equal chance of quality education, which can improve their lives in the future.

*Names have been changed to protect identities*
WEAI Welcomes the New 2012-2013 APAC Chair

Anna Keegan

Anna Keegan is pursuing a Master of International Affairs degree, working towards a concentration in Human Rights and a specialization in East Asia. Anna graduated from Colgate University in Hamilton, New York where she studied Sociology and Anthropology. After graduation, she worked at Harvard University's Extension School Development Office and served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Mongolia. Originally from Colorado, Anna attended junior high school in Indonesia from 1997-2000. She is interested in gender and public policy, women's rights, and international development issues in East and Southeast Asia.

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