

## Reciprocal Relations between Globalisation and Education in Asia

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### Background

Since the end of the twentieth century it has been commonplace to speak of globalisation, its causes, manifestations, consequences, promises and its discontents. Globalisation may be described simply as '*the accelerated movement of goods, services, capital, people and ideas across national borders*'. The spread of markets, capital, peoples and ideas across borders also characterised the earlier eras of imperialism and colonialism but it is the most recent phase of globalisation, starting from the late 1960s and the 1970s, that forms the main focus of this lecture.

In thinking about globalisation it is important to distinguish its manifestations from its underlying drivers. The spread of markets, capital, peoples and ideas across border may be thought of as the manifestations of globalisation. Its drivers, I would suggest, are economic policies, supported, especially since the 1990s by the digital technological revolution that has accelerated the speed of communication exponentially.

The relationship between globalisation and education is reciprocal. One can address it in at least two directions: 'what is the impact of globalisation on education?' and 'what is the impact of education on globalisation?'

Globalisation of the 1970s was prompted by declining economic growth, oil shocks, rising inflation and pressures on public expenditures in many industrialised countries. Across the globe, monetarist neo-liberal policies designed to increase growth were introduced. Dubbed 'Thatcherism' and 'Reaganomics' these policies advocated deregulated finance sectors, privatisation of state-owned companies and reduced government spending, among other measures. International finance institutions which had, through the 1960s and early 1970s, advised poorer countries to substitute costly imports with home-grown food and goods – a strategy known as 'import substitution' - were now advising a shift away from this and towards economic and trade liberalisation. A new phase of global capitalism and a restructuring of the world economy had begun.

### The four themes of the lecture

First, I ask the question 'what impact has globalisation had on education?' I take an example of a country with which Japan has extensive economic and cultural relations and which embarked on an economic globalisation strategy from the late 1970s. That country is Sri Lanka and the analysis that follows is based on a recently published book *Globalisation, employment and education in Sri Lanka: opportunity and division*, co-authored with Siri Hettige of the University of Colombo.

Second, I ask the reciprocal question. 'What are the education conditions that help countries to globalise?' Here I examine the experiences of the four Asian Tiger economies which eschewed the advice of the international finance institutions in the 1960s and 1970s and which integrated rapidly into the global economy.

Third, I return to the case of Sri Lanka and ask why, when Sri Lanka was ahead of most other Asian countries in 1950, her economy fell so far behind?

Finally, I question dominant concepts of globalisation – and ask whether the concept of sustainability needs to be more actively included in programmes for desirable development and what the educational implications might be.

**Question 1:** What impact did globalisation have on education in Sri Lanka? Politically independent in 1948, Sri Lanka followed the import substitution strategy from the mid 1950s to mid 1970s. She strove for economic self reliance, nationalised agricultural and manufacturing production. In education she unified a diverse array of schools into one state system, strengthened a national examination system and strove to delink subject syllabi and curriculum texts from the former colonial power, Britain. Formerly private and denominational schools were nationalised. Youth unrest, Very low economic growth and very high rates of unemployment among educated youth during the late 1960s led to widespread youth unrest and the downfall of the left leaning regime of the 1970s. A change of government to the right in 1977 led to the introduction of the open economy policies of Export Oriented Liberalisation with the relaxation of exchange controls, the lifting of import restrictions, promotion of foreign investment and the establishment of free trade zones to promote export-oriented industries. All were designed to promote Sri Lanka's participation in a rapidly globalising economy.

Overall, our story of globalisation, employment and education in Sri Lanka is one of growth *and* disparity, of new opportunities and continuing and widening divisions.

- Since liberalisation the growth of the economy has been unprecedented.
- Average household incomes have increased, *but* their distribution has worsened.
- Unemployment rates have declined *but* among women they remain high and twice that for men.
- Young people are more likely to be employed rather than unemployed. They are more likely to be employed in manufacturing and services rather than in agriculture, and employed in the private sector, *but* they are also more likely to have casual rather than regular employment.
- Access to qualifications, both foreign and domestic, has increased among all social groups but it is the better-off that have greater access to the foreign-controlled examinations perceived to bring greater labour market returns.
- Young people's educational and occupation expectation levels are much higher than earlier *but* for many those expectations remain unfulfilled.
- The relationship between educational and occupation expectation levels and social class remains strong. *But* it appears to have become stronger for occupational expectations, but not educational expectations. In other words, comparing the expectations of youth in the pre-liberalisation period and the post-liberalisation period, the gap between the middle and the lower classes has widened.
- Educational participation has increased at all levels for all social groups, *but* access to Science, IT and English, and to the private sector post-secondary opportunities that provide pathways to the new jobs in the liberalised economy, is concentrated in urban areas.
- Finally, performance in many academic school subjects appears to be increasing, *but* significant disparities remain between schools of different types, different language media, different locations and between boys and girls, with girls outperforming boys in most subjects.

**Question 2:** What are the educational conditions that help countries to globalise? Already by the 1960s and 1970s Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore had embarked on an economic strategy of the export of manufactured goods long before the international finance institutions were advocating this as a global panacea. What can we learn about the education strategies adopted by these successful globalisers? First we must examine their common development features and second their common education features.

*Common Development Features*

- Export orientation, focused on manufactured goods
- Adaptation to ever 'higher added value' activity
- Availability of foreign exchange
- High levels of investment and savings
- Absence of rural landowning class
- Increases in rural productivity
- Increases in income equality
- Adoption of and adaptation to the information paradigm

*Common Education Features*

- Availability of educated low paid, highly productive and disciplined labour
- High levels of basic education and literacy prior to economic growth
- Gender equitable access
- Equitable public education expenditures
- Open, competitive and largely meritocratic education
- Creation of strong sense of national solidarity and identity

**Question 3** Why did Sri Lanka fall behind the Asian Tigers? At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Sri Lanka's economy – albeit a colonial economy was an export-led economy, integrated into world markets, *par excellence*. Based on the export of plantation crops – mainly tea and rubber – the economy was strong enough to give her 'a standard of living well ahead of that in the rest of South Asia and most of South-East Asia, with the possible exception of Singapore and parts of the Federated Malay states. And her performance on education indicators became very strong indeed. Sri Lankans often recall that when Lee Kwan Yew visited Sri Lanka shortly after her independence in 1948 he averred that Sri Lanka provided a development model for Singapore to emulate. Far from lagging behind the Asian Tigers, Sri Lanka had been well out in front in both economic and social terms in 1950. Among the factors that held Sri Lanka back from strengthening her pre-eminent position were:

- Import substitution policy , low growth, high unemployment among the educated
- Low foreign exchange, domestic savings and investment
- Inefficient public sector
- Pervasive politicisation of policy implementation
- Little development of higher, technical and vocational education
- Educational segregation strengthened ethnic and weakened national identities

**Question 4** Much of the literature on globalisation positions economic growth as is underlying goal. Over time increasing attention was paid to the equity dimension. Successful globalisation came to be defined as economic growth with equitable outcomes across the members of society. In my own work on a notion of successful globalisation with colleagues I introduced a third dimension – peace. My concern stemmed mainly from my analysis of the globalisation process in Sri Lanka where growth and a degree of equity from the late 1970s were accompanied by a civil war that destroyed thousands of lives. How could we judge that a country had globalised 'successfully' when it was at war with itself?

However, the notion of *sustainable* growth adds a new dimension to our development aspirations. Strategies for globalisation should not be considered to be successful if they are not also sustainable into the long-term future. Strategies for globalisation should not be considered to be successful if they so deplete natural and environmental resources that the needs of future generations are compromised. Export-oriented growth strategies may not always conserve a country's natural resources for the production of food and water for domestic consumption, which must be considered the most basic resource of all for the survival of people both in the present and the future. What education strategies might accompany such a notion of development are matters for discussion.