

Academic entrepreneurship in Asia: the role and impact of universities in national innovation systems, edited by Poh Kam Wong, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2011, 354 pp., £79.95, ISBN 978-1-84980-307-6

Academic Entrepreneurship in Asia reflects the impact of globalisation at its most corrosive. The framework of the book is a series of case studies of selected universities in China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand, which are summarised in an introductory chapter by the editor and a colleague from the Entrepreneurship Centre of the National University of Singapore, who are also the authors of the account of that university's 'entrepreneurial university model'. Each case study echoes the mantra, first enunciated in the USA and Western Europe, of the imperative of transition from an investment-driven to an innovation-driven approach to economic development, powered by a knowledge-based strategy. Each case study explicitly or implicitly cites the 'triple helix' model of government-industry-university, an idea popularised by Henry Etzkowitz, and first used to analyse developments in science and technology funding in the USA. Individual chapters describe in mostly self-congratulatory terms how each university is matching up to the role envisaged in the Etzkowitz model. Thus, the reader is deluged with statistics about the numbers of patents achieved, the size of the publication count, the growth in industrially sponsored research and the number of business start-ups, with little analysis of the academic disciplines involved or the extent to which the activities really have an economic impact. In summary, the institutional accounts represent a recycling of received ideas pursued uncritically and without any reflection as to whether the model is remotely relevant to economies like those of, for example, Hong Kong and Singapore. This is compounded by the fact that each case study is authored by someone who is on the staff of the university concerned, thus guaranteeing that critical analysis of policy and performance is minimised.

But perhaps from a higher education perspective, the most depressing feature of the book is the identification of academic entrepreneurialism with the commercialisation of research. The case studies essentially give an account of technology transfer activity in different university and cultural settings. There is no reference to Clark's (1998) vision of entrepreneurialism as creating the conditions of institutional self-reliance – most of the case study universities seem to be firmly under the thumb of their governments – nor of the importance of an entrepreneurial academic heartland; in these institutions, technology transfer seems generally to be mandated from above, not generated from below. Indeed, there is no indication at all that academic entrepreneurialism might be a reflection of individual academic creativity, as relevant in the humanities and social sciences as it is in STEM subjects. Rather, entrepreneurialism emerges as the product of a belief that a university's role in a 'national innovation strategy' is simply to collaborate with industry. Entrepreneurialism is not an expression of academic 'animal spirits' but of target setting and state direction.

Two aspects of technology transfer in general are worth commenting on. The first is the pride with which universities describe in this book the list of patents they have taken out: but there is no mention of the economics of the process. Intellectual property was a big theme in the US and UK universities in the 1980s but it soon began to be realised that filing for patents and protecting them was an expensive business and that the returns were variable. Moreover, in fields like engineering – less so in the life sciences – an insistence on claiming intellectual property rights came to be seen as a disincentive to long-term collaboration with industry. Patents taken out may represent a quantifiable performance indicator, calculated to impress politicians, but experience in the US and UK suggests that unless the process is heavily subsidised, the costs do not usually justify themselves and may not generate anything like as large financial and academic returns as long-term industrial partnerships,

where research and development go hand in hand. The priority given to the acquisition of intellectual property rights in these accounts is a clear example of the danger of enslavement to another culture's ideas when those ideas have moved on.

A second aspect of technology transfer and, supposedly, entrepreneurialism is the payment of overheads by industry for research undertaken in universities, a topic which is simply not mentioned at all. Unless properly calculated overheads are paid, universities are essentially subsidising their industry sponsors. This is a surprising omission in any discussion of academic entrepreneurialism and one can only assume that it does not appear because the pressure on universities to undertake industrial collaboration is such that indirect costs will always be borne by the university. This implies an unequal relationship in which one partner in the collaboration is, in an important sense, subordinate to the other.

From a UK perspective, one of the benefits of the book, notwithstanding the occasional self-serving nature of some of the contributions, is the insight it gives to the development of individual universities in systems over which one cannot claim expert knowledge. There is little evidence here that the systems in China and India are going to challenge the intellectual creativity of Western universities, as it is sometimes alleged they are about to do: Tsinghua is obviously a powerful institution and the dramatic expansion of science and technology centres across China is most impressive but the instrumental nature of the investment does not suggest it will lead to creativity in science but primarily to R&D support for Chinese industry and commerce. The Institutes of Technology in India may offer more in this respect, but they are tiny, at around 2000 students each, and by any calculation fail to meet the scale of India's needs or the demand there for high-quality university education. The National University of Singapore is a strong institution but its entrepreneurial freedom is very obviously shackled to the demands of the state. Only Tokyo University and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology have the requisite history of autonomy and intellectual freedom to compete with the kind of academic innovation, which one would find at ETH Zurich or Imperial College London.

The message one takes from this book is that in Asia the pursuit of the university's third mission is restricted to the commercialisation of research and support for the economy, and is dictated by a blueprint based on other cultures. Rather, what Asian universities need to do is to trust their own intellectual resources and release the entrepreneurial instincts of their staffs so that they offer an intrinsically Asian model of university development.

Reference

Clark, B.R. 1998. *Creating entrepreneurial universities: Organisational pathways of transformation*. Oxford: IAU Press, Pergamon.

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Politics and the primary teacher, by Peter Cunningham, London, Routledge, 2012, 144 pp., £90.00 (hardback), ISBN 0-4155-4958-5; £21.99 (paperback), ISBN 0-2031-3589-1

Teachers are back in the political spotlight in Britain, following the publication of the White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* by the Conservative-Liberal Coalition Government at the end of 2010. Whereas, twenty years ago, in the view of the then Conservative Government,