



Berkeley Public Policy Press - September 2017

[Book Website](#)  
[Order via Amazon](#)

Berkeley Center for Studies in  
Higher Education  
 EAST-WEST CENTER  
COLLABORATION • EXPERTISE • LEADERSHIP

**BP<sup>3</sup>**  
BERKELEY  
PUBLIC POLICY PRESS

## Introduction: The Asian *New Flagship University*—Seeking a Yi Liu Future

John Aubrey Douglass (UC Berkeley) and  
John N. Hawkins (East-West Center/UCLA)

To a degree unmatched in other parts of the globe, the notion of a “World Class University” (WCU) and the focus on its close relative, global rankings of universities, dominates the higher education policymaking of ministries and major universities in Asia. Just focusing on China for the moment, in the late 1990s, and in the midst of a dramatic investment in and re-organization of China’s higher education system, ministerial officials asked researchers at Shanghai Jiaotong University to help devise a way to understand the quality of its national universities. There existed national rankings of institutions in the US, with most serving as consumer guides for prospective students. But there was no global ranking of universities. Focused on the concept of research productivity as the primary indicator of quality and the marker of the best universities in the world, the first Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) was generated for the Chinese government and became a regular publication beginning in 2003.

Why the attention almost exclusively on research productivity and a few key markers of prestige, like Nobel Laureates? One major reason was, and is, that globally retrievable citation indexes (also a relatively new phenomenon) and variables such as research income are now readily available and not subject to the labor intensive, and sometimes dubious, efforts to request and get data from individual institutions.

But another reason is the sense that research productivity and influence remain the key identifiers of the best universities. The ancillary is that other primary missions of the most influential universities, such as high quality undergraduate and graduate education, a devotion to public service, universities as pathways for socio-economic mobility and regional economic development, are less important and, ultimately, harder to measure. Yet these are also key activities that require nurturing and expansion for top universities in Asia, and in the larger world.

Around the same time as the publication of the first ARWU, the mantra of what is and what is not a “World Class University” emerged in full force. This was influenced by the growing anxiety among many nations that they lacked one or more top-tier research universities, which they considered to be crucial to their economic competitiveness. NGOs like the World Bank argued that most developing economies should strive to replicate such universities.

Because the character, behaviors and attributes of a WCU remain vague even to its promoters, the default was to simply refer to the ARWU, or one of a handful of other global rankings of universities that have since emerged. Most nations in Asia are pursuing higher education policies and funding schemes fixated on uplifting a selected group of national universities into the global ranking heavens.

National goals of reaching the top 100, or more ambitiously the top 25, are ubiquitous. Hence, the national role of the university as an engine of socioeconomic mobility, a producer of knowledge in STEM fields, a collaborator with local businesses and government agencies, or a creator of the next generation of leaders is not relevant in a globally based bell-curve notion of what constitutes the ideal university.

The *New Flagship University* model, first articulated in more detail in *The New Flagship University* (Douglass 2016), and briefly outlined in the first chapter of this book, provides both a more holistic and ecological vision of what constitutes the best and most influential national universities—a lens through which to view the past and future of Asia’s leading national universities. The model offers a broad conception of the purpose and goals of these institutions.

This book is about Asia’s leading national universities and is based, in part, on a seminar held on the Zhejiang University campus in May 2016 that included scholars and practitioners from China, Vietnam, South Korea, India, Japan, Singapore, and other Pacific Rim nations. The main question we asked: is the *New Flagship University* model applicable or useful to leading national universities in Asia? We also asked of our participants these questions: are the histories, or cultural and socioeconomic needs of these leading national universities so significantly different from the Western context that they are forging their own distinct, or perhaps, Asian model? What are the important contextual variables that constrain and influence institutions that might claim the *New Flagship* title?

The result was a robust discussion on the past and vital future of Asia’s leading university. The chapters range broadly in their exploration of the impact of the WCU rhetoric and its myopic focus on rankings, in the concept of quality in Asian universities, the limitations posed by existing ministerial demands and academic culture, and provides examples of leading Asian

universities that are, on their own terms, embracing important aspects of the *New Flagship University* model.

### **The New *Flagship University* as Aspirational**

As presented in the first chapter of this book, the *New Flagship University* model focuses on four “Policy Realms” that help shape our understanding of not only the university’s purpose in society, but also its operational characteristics: its role in national systems of higher education, its core missions of teaching, learning, research, public service, and economic engagement, and its internal management and accountability practices. In each Policy Realm, there is a short discussion of key policies, activities, and outputs. To be sure, a number of leading research-intensive universities are already pursuing many of the aspects of the *Flagship* model within their own cultural and political realities.

Douglass’ 2016 book provides numerous examples of programs and activities of innovative universities found throughout the world. But it is also true that, in the face of the dominant WCU and ranking paradigm, most academic leaders and their academic communities have had difficulty conceptualizing and articulating the university’s grander purpose and its potential for multiple engagements with society.

The *Flagship* moniker harkens back to this larger vision found not only in the origins of the US land grant universities, but also national universities in Latin America. The *New Flagship* qualification helps to stress that the most productive and engaged universities—those that seek societal relevancy—are much more diverse and complex in the range of their activities and goals than in any other time in their history. Take almost any current public research university, and some non-profit privates, and compare their sense of purpose, funding, programs, and expectations of stakeholders, with fifty or even twenty years ago, and they are very different.

At the same time, the *Flagship* model is not a rejection of global rankings. Ranking products are here to stay. They are a useful benchmark for ministries, universities, and citizens. The problem is that they represent a very narrow band of what it means to be a leading university within a region, or within a nation. Further, while there are effective strategies to boost article production, citations, and rankings, WCU advocates do not provide much guidance, or knowledge, regarding specific organizational behaviors and methods that can lead to greater productivity in research, better teaching, or the public services that best meet the needs of the societies these universities serve.

The *New Flagship* model is not intended as a set of required attributes and practices. This begs the question of which particular policies and practices, or indeed the larger understanding of the purpose of a university itself, are

culturally determined and relevant to a particular nation-state. As Douglass notes in his previous book, “To state the obvious, different nations and their universities operate in different environments, reflecting their own national cultures, politics, expectations, and the realities of their socioeconomic world. The purpose [of the *New Flagship* model] is not to create a single template or checklist, but an expansive array of characteristics and practices that connects a selective group of universities—an aspiration model. However, many institutions and ministries may see only a subset as relevant, or only some aspirations as achievable in the near term.”

And finally, an important tenet of the *New Flagship* model is that there are limits to the effectiveness of governmental and ministerial interventions in university operations. Most universities in Asia, and within Europe and elsewhere, have had weak internal cultures of accountability and management. Government driven interventions and funding incentives have pushed much needed reform in much of the world. But ultimately, leading universities need to have greater control and build their own internal academic cultures through efforts focused on institutional self-improvement. The *New Flagship* model attempts to decipher, and provide examples of, pathways for building this culture and for internal accountability practices that bolster academic management.

### **Asia’s Leading National Universities: The Context**

Higher education in Asia has a long history of elite, leading national universities that have served the region well over the decades of their existence. Most are highly selective institutions, employing among the best scholars, and serving as the primary path for creating a nation’s civic elites in the absence of other postsecondary institutions (Hawkins 2013). These leading universities have, historically, been grounded in national service, but with a limited vision of their role in socioeconomic mobility, economic development, and public service. There was little external pressure and internal desire to change. One thinks of the grand national role played by the University of Tokyo, Zhejiang University, Peking University, and Seoul National University in East Asia, and on a smaller scale their counterparts in Southeast Asia and South Asia, all largely fitting the mold of what we are calling the *Traditional Flagship University*. Even as national governments pushed to expand access to higher education—the process of massification—many leading national universities sometimes seem stuck in time, until recently.

Today’s leading Asian national universities have undergone a metamorphosis, pushed by increasing expectations of a more expanded role in society and the competitive needs of national economies. Because their mission was primarily “internal,” these universities were not initially concerned

with competing with other universities outside of their national setting. With the rise of the complex interplay of neoliberalism, globalization, and internationalization beginning in earnest in the 1990s, however, ministries and universities began to look “externally” for benchmarks of their quality and performance framed almost exclusively around the WCU/ranking paradigm—a worldwide phenomenon.

While the pursuit of improved rankings and a claim to WCU status continues as seemingly the primary goal for many universities in the Asian Pacific region, there has been a growing debate about the value and feasibility of this vision. Alternative paths are being discussed, which challenge and critique this model and suggest other more creative ways to look at the role of teaching, community service, R&D, and scholarship in higher education.

In turn, this has created a “predicament” for these *Asian Flagship Universities*: in a rapidly changing ecology of higher education in the region, Asian universities are compelled to search for strategic ways to increase research income, journal publications, and citations, while also seeking a more holistic approach to their mission and engagement with the regions they serve (Hawkins and Mok 2015).

Is it possible to strike a balance between teaching and research in the modern university or is the “research model” being blindly imitated globally? In the *New Flagship* model, these are compatible, indeed mutually reinforcing ideals; but this is not true for those focused myopically on the WCU and ranking paradigm. It has been difficult for universities in the region to avoid the temptation to be narrowly imitative rather than innovative in the race for WCU status, and almost exclusively focused on research productivity and faculty incentive practices found in the US and the UK, while ignoring the ethos of creating and sustaining an academic community. It is an erroneous understanding of an “emerging global model” (EGM) (Hawkins and Mok 2015).

In the rush toward imitation, it is important to keep in mind a criticism of American research-intensive universities, where many faculty are attracted to the prestige of research at the cost of teaching as a core responsibility; where increasing numbers of students are left without the benefit of mentoring by the very faculty they came to encounter. As faculty sort themselves out along the research axis (those who are successful and those who are not), particularly in STEM fields, another divide appears as those faculty less able as researchers pick up the teaching load or are simply let go through the tenure process. Again, this is a “research is the primary product” model that may not be the most productive for many universities and may in fact limit the possibilities of becoming an “innovative” university. This should not be the path of the leading national Asian universities!

## A Yi Liu Future?

This brings us back to the concept of the *New Flagship University* and its applicability in Asia. There is a place for both the *New Flagship* ideals and practices and the desire for the ranking-focused WCU model to co-exist. As Douglass argues, the *Flagship* model can be a route to WCU status, but WCU status is less likely to guarantee status as a *New Flagship University*. In a message intended for both ministries and university leaders in Asia and elsewhere, Douglass notes that the current top-ranked research-intensive universities on the ARWU, and particularly the public universities in the US, were not built around a narrow band of quantitative measures of research productivity or reputational surveys. “The path to national and international relevance is rooted in their larger socio-economic purpose, and to internal organizational cultures and practices focused on self-improvement.”

In contrasting the WCU paradigm with the *New Flagship* model it is important to note that scholars of higher education, and practitioners and ministerial actors, may have their own concepts of what a *Flagship* is, or should be, in different parts of the vast area we call Asia. The *Flagship* model also makes a number of major assumptions, such as: national and regional higher education systems have significant levels of mission differentiation among institutions, and a place for only a select number of truly leading or *yi liu* universities; there is a significant level of policy and practice convergence, and best practices that can be adapted to different national cultures and traditions; and universities can manage their evolution if given enough autonomy and sufficient levels of academic freedom.

≈

Again, this book explores the political, economic, cultural, and institutional peculiarities that are vital for understanding the past, present and future of leading national universities in Asia. It also devotes attention to the policies and practices, and the context and societal expectations, of these universities—subjects that are largely ignored in the literature and attention given to the WCU narrative. Here the strengths and weaknesses of universities are discussed and framed by the aspirational *New Flagship* model.

In his chapter on the historical context in which Asia’s leading universities operate, John N. Hawkins explains that although Western academic models currently impact various aspects of Asia’s modern higher education systems (including patterns of institutional governance, the ethos of the academic profession, the rhythm of academic life, ideas about science, procedures of examination and assessment, and in some cases the language of instruction) they do so in a context of rich intellectual and institutional traditions. In both

East Asia and South and Southeast Asia, centuries of higher education development predate Western influence. These strong intellectual traditions were firmly entrenched in the local context prior to Western contact and therefore continue to influence and dominate, in many aspects, the social, cultural, intellectual, and educational life of the Asian region.

While many institutions are currently patterned on Western models, it is also clear that Asian countries have adapted these models to suit local needs and realities, creating in some respects what is now called a “hybrid” model of higher education. Hence, notions such as the *Flagship University* are not unknown in the Asian context, but they are tempered by higher education developments and practices (such as traditions related to public service and engagement) that pre-date Western contact, in some cases by thousands of years.

Next, David P. Ericson explores the notion of quality in higher education in Asia, noting a fervor in each country to have one or more universities listed among the elite in the world rankings of universities. His chapter explains why chasing after high world rankings is not necessarily the same as exhibiting high educational quality as a university. He then discusses different meanings of “quality” in higher education and how this can be usefully linked to the *New Flagship* ideal in Asian higher education, providing several examples of Asian universities that are moving, whether knowingly or not, toward this model.

The chapters that follow explore the historical development of various leading universities in South Korea, China, India, and Japan. While national universities in South Korea have historically enjoyed a privileged position in their higher education system, Stephanie K. Kim, and Minho Yeom explain that these elite institutions face acute challenges, including the status pressure created by global rankings. Ultimately, they argue that the future relevance of these institutions may require the adoption of a more flexible approach to excellence that strikes a balance between the ranking-dominated World Class University concept and the aspirational *New Flagship University* model.

Miloni Gandhi draws a similar conclusion in her chapter on India, which focuses on Delhi University; she also asks if there is room for other *Flagships* to emerge in a vast country with a largely underperforming higher education system. Ka Ho Mok and Xiao Han’s chapter is a case study of an elite Chinese university located in an underdeveloped region. They investigate this unnamed university’s institutional capacity in four of the areas of policy and practice outlined in the *New Flagship* model: research, international collaboration, regional economic engagement/technology transfer, and governance mechanism. In their view, the unfavorable location of the university, coupled with restrictive funding policies, create large barriers for this Chinese university to elevate its social mission and boost research productivity.



Satoshi P. Watanabe and Machi Sato examine Hiroshima University and Shinshu University as case studies of mission nuance and regional engagement. In their analysis, the authors observe that the *New Flagship University* model offers a framework that can guide the transformation of Japanese universities, but that allows them to remain grounded in their founding purposes and historical commitments—a dedication to tradition that is not adequately captured or recognized by global rankings or the rhetoric of World Class Universities.

Similarly, Mosi Weng and Jia Zhang analyze the many ways that China's Zhejiang University is expanding its regional economic role. Zhejiang plays a significant role in the building of major scientific and technological innovation platforms in local districts, through which it supports both the upgrading of traditional industries and the expansion of strategic emerging industries. In addition, Zhejiang is attracting and cultivating high quality talent (in part the result of an innovative entrepreneurship education program) that fills local labor needs and generates new businesses in the Zhejiang province. The university also promotes regional development by collaborating with local governments to establish both independent and affiliated colleges, while also supporting the operations and betterment of existing local universities.

Bryan Edward Penprase offers two chapters that focus on Singapore. The first discusses a set of innovative undergraduate educational initiatives pursued by the National University of Singapore (NUS). Beginning in 2000, the University President and the Singaporean government collaborated on major reforms in NUS's governance. In turn, this enabled innovation in the design of its undergraduate curriculum, which began as small pilots that were carefully assessed and then "scaled" up to university-wide programs or new degree programs. They include a new and wide-ranging Core Curriculum, an interdisciplinary science program, Design-Centric approaches, and new ways of teaching engineering. Penprase also provides a separate chapter on Yale-NUS College. He discusses the path to this innovative collaboration between two great universities, which purposefully elevates the liberal arts in Asia. Both chapters provide examples of how a *Flagship University* can rapidly develop its capacity for excellent undergraduate education across a wide range of faculties when enabled by strategic leadership.

Deane Neubauer, Joanne Taira and Donald Young provide a final case study. They explain how the University of Hawai'i is unique among public universities in the United States, in part because it borders the worlds of the East and West, and because of its formal relationships in the delivery of education and training across an archipelago with institutions at all higher education levels, including community colleges. In its earliest manifestations, it more closely resembled a hybrid of the University of California system, but over the past several decades it has evolved to have more extensive and

sophisticated functions performed at the institutional level, by all ten members, and by the over-arching system administration.

Operating through a recently developed ten-year strategic plan, the University of Hawai'i system is focused on developing new tools to help define and operationalize activities that enhance the public good, while simultaneously continuing traditional aspects of its historical mission: namely, service to the state, world-class research in designated fields, international outreach, especially to Asia, and increasingly, identification with and support for Hawaiian culture.

≈

Combined, the chapters in this book raise a number of interesting questions. For one, what are the cultural and organizational barriers for pursuing the holistic and aspirational *New Flagship* model, or perhaps more specifically, to pursuing it in a way that is shaped by and serves national cultural and social norms? Zhejiang University offers an interesting focus on regional economic engagement and coordination with other postsecondary institutions; is this a path that could be replicable in other parts of Asia? Hiroshima and Shinshu Universities also provide examples of local yet also selective economic engagement linked to their academic strengths and historical role in the region.

The National University of Singapore demonstrates a persistent desire to innovate, including major reforms in its undergraduate programs. How much does this reflect NUS's maturing academic culture as an institution that constantly seeks improvement (a hallmark of the *New Flagship University* model)? And finally, there is the concept of multi-campus systems. Is there the possibility of leading national universities in other parts of the Pacific Rim forging more formal regional relationships with other types of higher education institutions—like the University of Hawai'i?

The strength of this book lies in its contemplation of a larger purpose for leading national universities, and in its examples of how institutions approach aspects of the *Flagship* or *yi liu* concept. But it is also true that few of the authors were able to conceptualize the breadth of the *New Flagship University* model—a model that has one foot in the past, but is in many ways a very new type of institution.

In thinking of the future, the authors also contemplate what the Chinese, South Korean, Indian, and Japanese version of the *New Flagship* could be. It is difficult to pinpoint what pathways exist for the internal discussions within universities that will allow them to strategically broaden their search for improvement, beyond the rankings-driven quest to simply generate more scholarly publications and chase similar prestige factors. A prerequisite is a

robust internal academic culture that enables a collaborative and strategic management capability—a key variable in the *New Flagship* model.

National higher education systems in Asia are rapidly changing; old ways are being replaced by new policies and practices in an era where universities are being redefined in their mission and societal reach. Many academic leaders and ministries are beginning to understand that the bell-curve approach of rankings and the research-dominant notion of the “World Class University” are no longer adequate to help guide policy, funding, and practice. We hope that this manuscript helps to further discussions within universities about their larger purpose and the sort of internal academic culture that will bolster the drive of the best universities in the world: to constantly look for ways to improve and positively shape and influence the societies they serve. Globalization and the urge for international benchmarking, interaction, and status, are among the forces that leading universities must engage with; the rise of nationalism in many parts of the world is another force.

We think that the *New Flagship* ideals provide a pathway for university leaders and faculty, and ministerial actors, to navigate these forces, and to generate an academic culture and management capacity that is enlightened and influential. Their future vitality depends on serious contemplation within the academy. The questions we asked of our contributing authors can be, and should be, asked and contemplated at all universities that view themselves as innovative and progressive institutions.



## References

- Douglass, John Aubrey. 2016. *The New Flagship University: Changing the Paradigm from Global Ranking to National Relevancy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hawkins, John N. 2016. “The Predicament of the Quest for WCU Status and Seeking an Asian *Flagship University*.” In *The New Flagship University: Changing the Paradigm from Global Ranking to National Relevancy*, ed. John Aubrey Douglass. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hawkins, John N. and Ka Ho Mok. 2015. *Research, Development, and Innovation In Asia Pacific Higher Education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

