GLOBALIZATION, INTERNATIONALIZATION AND ASIAN EDUCATIONAL HUBS: 
Do We Need Some New Metaphors?  
October 2015 

John N. Hawkins *  
UCLA 

Copyright 2015 John N. Hawkins, all rights reserved. 

ABSTRACT 
It is not uncommon when reading about higher education change in the Asia Pacific region to see it described in the context of globalization and internationalization. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably as in “the globalized university”, “internationalization of higher education”, “internationalizing the university in the age of globalization” and so on. Often the use of these terms assumes that the reader knows how to distinguish between them, how they relate to each other, and how these large, somewhat slippery concepts are connected to individual HEIs. This paper attempts to raise questions about the rigor of these terms especially as they relate to the recent rise of the phenomenon of “Asian Educational Hubs.” 

Keywords: Globalization, Internationalization, Asian Higher Education Hubs 

Globalization, internationalization, and now, educational hubs, are terms we often see in the current literature about higher educational change in the Asian Pacific region (see extensive bibliography in Arnove, Torres, Franz 2013, for a representative sample of this literature). In perusing the literature, however, these terms also seem to be jumbled up, intertwined with one another, and at times lacking context, as if they are immediately understood for what they are and how they are connected. There is, however, some agreement on what comes first, second and third. In this case, globalization is the new stage of history that surrounds us and our institutions (i.e. higher education), internationalization is what we do (or pledge to do) to our higher education institutions (hereafter HEIs) to adapt to globalization, and educational hubs are becoming one major policy response that, at least in Asia, is seen as a political-economic structure designed to maintain a competitive edge in the globalized and internationalized HE landscape. 

But questions remain about the meaning, relationships, relevance, and endurance of what are really metaphors, meant to be representative or symbolic of something else. Do these terms mean the same thing as they did ten years ago or even a few months ago? How much intellectual rigor do they possess such that one can say something definite about them and most people will know what is being discussed? What metrics can be used to solidify these terms more accurately? If globalization and internationalization have changed in meaning in recent years what are “Asian educational hubs” all about? In this brief paper it is not possible to delve too deeply into this debate, rather I will put forth some thoughts to suggest that these metaphors need to be looked at more critically if we are to understand this new HE phenomenon in Asia. Let us begin with a novel and interesting critique of the concept of globalization. 

Globalization 
It is likely that more ink has been spilled trying to define globalization than almost any other recent social science concept (including some by my hand). In one such summary of the literature (Mok and Hawkins 2008) it was noted that three major schools of thought dominated this discussion: hyper-globalists, skeptics, and transformationalists. Hyper-globalists strongly believe that the global economy is dominated by uncontrollable global forces in which nation-states are structurally dependent on global capital that is primarily determined by Transnational National Corporations (TNCs). 

* John N. Hawkins is a consultant for the East-West Center’s International Forum for Education 2020 and Professor Emeritus and Director of the Center for International and Development Studies at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.
To believers in this strong globalism, the globalizing economy means a drastic shift in structural power and authority away from the nation state towards non-state agencies and from national political systems to a global economic system (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton, 1999). Unlike these strong globalists, those who oppose the convergence theory think that globalization is overstated and over-generalized. According to skeptics, nation states are more heterogeneous and independent in action than they are given credit for. Since they have never responded to the external changes in the same fashion, there are a wide variety of local and regional responses to globalization. In this regard, they argue that contemporary levels of economic interdependence are not historically unprecedented. In contrast, the global economy is less global in its geographical embrace than one might think, especially when compared with the former world empires.

In fact, the nation state retains its identity and finds ways to keep globalization at bay. Taking a stand between the hyper-globalists and the skeptics, the transformationalists believe globalization is unprecedented but there is no convergence. However, social institutions (i.e. higher education) are being significantly transformed.

As one can see, the discussion centers generally on a sliding scale between global homogeneity and regionalism/nationalism, although much more has been written about globalization since these observations were made. What is somewhat new, are the suggestions that globalization has had an expiration date written on it and that it is almost, if not completely, up both theoretically and in practice. Just to take two examples of this proposition, Professor Justin Rosenberg of the department of international relations at the University of Sussex has argued that globalization as a theory or social science construct is dead if it was ever alive at all (Rosenberg 2005). He suggests that it died circa 2000. Cause of death: “congenital misplaced concreteness, leading to terminal intellectual complications, compounded by sudden loss of life-supporting ideological plausibility.” (p. 42). The notion that globalization was deepening interconnectedness to the point that it was transforming society and its substructures (i.e. HEIs), essentially leading toward the replacement of the sovereign state system and its components with a new multilayered multilateral system was “falsified by the course of world affairs” (p. 43).

National interests continued as they had in the past, to prevail in several key international contests, especially in the contest for a globalized approach to education and HE in particular. When this happens, the so-called globalized milieu in which we are all supposed to be swimming, dries up quickly to local ponds fenced in increasingly by national interests. Yet, the language of globalization and internationalization still remains, almost as an afterthought in HE mission statements, strategic plans, and other policy documents, and various measures are celebrated to demonstrate the degree to which a given HEI is responding to globalization. Some examples of these measures will be highlighted in the next section on internationalization.

As if this theoretical destruction were not enough, economist Joshua Cooper Ramo (who coined the term “Beijing consensus, is a member of Council on Foreign Relations, Vice Chair of Kissinger and Associates, as well as other high level economic policy bodies) argues that whatever remains of what we think constitutes globalization is now going backwards (Ramo 2013). In a provocative article in Fortune magazine he argues that globalization has a “reverse” gear and is now in full retreat, unwinding itself, such that there is a trend toward “inwardness”, or the “rise of the inside” (p. 1) as opposed to the last twenty years experience of an ever expanding “outwardness” and interconnectedness.

From trade as a proportion of GDP, to banking, manufacturing, career developments, what we eat, wear, build and learn and where we do all of this, nations and communities are looking inward and thickening their local, internal networks rather than expanding them, he argues. In one crucial area, often used as a measure of the globalization of knowledge, academic publishing and co-publishing on higher education research in Asia has slowed and is just keeping pace with world-wide trends as authors concentrate on local HE issues and concerns rather than co-authored studies between regions and nations (Jung and Horta 2013). One could spin out this novel proposition in several directions not the least of which are toward our HEIs which have been agonizing how to be more globalization and internationalization and wondering why this is such hard and confusing work.

If that is case, one might say, somewhat to our surprise, that globalization, at least in this historical round, is expiring, and in fact has run its course and is now being supplanted by “insiderization”. Which also means that the internationalization of HEIs may no longer be, if it ever really was, a top priority of university administrators and faculty who now do not have to invest lip service and funds to those features that counted toward obtaining the label of being a “globalized and internationalized” university or college. Or at the very least, they do not have to feel guilty about focusing resources and priorities on serving local and national interests.

Finally, in this context, we see the rise of “educational hubs”, more specifically in Asia, as a means for HEIs to continue to benefit from student and faculty mobility without risking losing their own academic capital through the various “brain” interactions (drain, train, gain, etc.) that came to characterize HEIs in an era of “globalization and internationalization (more about that later).
While the views expressed by those cited here might seem extreme and therefore not representative of the bulk of the literature on globalization, it is sometimes useful to push the envelope in order to open up new ways of thinking and sharpening what we mean by such concepts and metaphors, and how they may in fact need to be rethought.

**Internationalization**

This term has been used loosely to describe efforts within the domain of higher education to move beyond an institution that focuses principally on localized, national concerns to one broadly connected to global concerns to one more broadly connected to global concerns. As Knight and deWitt point out (2009), the term internationalization has a very long history and may have characterized the original form and content of what is meant by “the university”. Here the discussion will be focused on the relationship between globalization as it has been discussed above and the policy response of internationalization. In this sense, internationalization follows the agreement that globalization has blurred the common distinctions that we have had about nation, state and culture which includes student scholar mobility institutional change, various forms of “memoranda of understanding” (MOUs), branch campuses, multi-lingual instruction, curricular adaptation, infusion of international content into the curriculum, joint multi-national research and so on (Chan 2011).

This quest for what constitutes internationalization is closely linked to the notion that globalization comes first and HEIs respond with various policies (e.g. increasing the number of international students and scholars, etc.) that are called “internationalization”. From the previous discussion questioning the current state of globalization, it would follow that efforts to “internationalize” HE would be faltering, slowing down, or seeking to satisfy localized, national level interests. One problem in this discussion has been to specify what measures might be used to determine if a HEI is on the road to being “internationalized”? In other words, what does it mean to be internationalized?

As part of a study of my own institution, UCLA (which was cited by the International Institute of Education (IIE) as being in the top five of internationalized universities in the US) we might expect to see two broad changes in the institution’s strategy over time (Hawkins 2012a):

- Institutional adaptation to better handle the scale of internationalized activities, that is structural, curricular, human resource changes that would involve the establishment of new offices, structures, protocols, and so on.
- Institutional transformation, that is the HEI itself would begin to adopt HE practices and policies of the nations with which it is most involved; in other words, institutional evolution not just adaptation would begin to occur.

Quantitative studies of the following five features of a HEI would provide useful data to determine how much progress is being made toward these two goals:

- Institutional support and structure
- Academic requirements (curricular among others)
- Faculty policies and opportunities, the academic culture
- Faculty mobility in and out for substantive periods of time
- International and local student mobility; including post docs

Then of course there would need to be some agreement on what quantum constituted sufficient progress to warrant labeling a HEI as being internationalized (e.g. 5% of undergraduates are international students? 10% of faculty are engaged in joint international research? Etc.).

The UCLA study revealed that in 2012 the university’s volume and scope of internationalization along these five measures was minimal, and skewed toward a few countries and disciplines, as is the case in most US universities. Furthermore data over the past five years demonstrates that the internationalization trend at UCLA has either stalled or is slowing down considerably (and becoming even more asymmetrical with respect to international focus). More case study research needs to be done to see how this record fits with other HEIs in the US and elsewhere but several observations by scholars in this field seem to confirm the hypothesis that some internationalization trends are moving in a direction away from the common understandings of what constitutes internationalization. This is also in keeping with the observations regarding the “reverse” movement of globalization.

For example, the Bologna process in Europe has been of great interest to HEIs in Asia and to educational policy makers in the region as a structural mechanism to further promote internationalization, but Scott (2012), deWitt and Hunter (2013) and others report that developmental and nationalistic forces in that region of the world have resulted in a shift from “external” to “internal” here as well: “The creation of a European citizenship, a key objective in European programs seems to be slipping away,” (deWitt...
and Hunter p.2) and with it the unrealized potential of broad internationalization of European HE in terms of mobility, structure and impact. Scott says the Bologna process has been “highjacked” by national interests (Scott 2012). The outcomes for internationalization of HE has shifted to the national level and while the rhetoric remains of a more external impact, the question is raised of the “darker side” of internationalization where there will be less rather than more of Europe in it (deWitt and Hunter 2013).

In looking further at the five characteristics of internationalization noted above, several observations suggest a slowing down if not a reverse movement of the trends we have been measuring. One of the most recalcitrant areas as suggested above in point two, is the curriculum. At least in the US, and I would suggest also in Asia, claims to have an internationalized curriculum often are anchored in serving the national interest (economic development, strategic concerns—NDEA Title VI for example) rather than fostering a capacity to “think internationally.” Stanley Katz of the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton notes this in his article appropriately titled: “Borderline ignorance” (2014). He reports on a statement issued by four liberal arts university presidents that in the US we need a curriculum that would require that students acquire skills, literacies, and dispositions “including respect, vulnerability, hospitality compassion, agency, agility, fairness, service and leadership” rather than the conventional focus on language and culture awareness (p. 12). He notes the most so-called “global” and “internationalized” programs are ghettoized in centers, departments, sometimes schools rather than being diffused throughout the college and university curriculum. This does not allow one to claim to be either globalized or internationalized.

Central to getting beyond the narrow curricular focus in most HEIs in the US and Asia is the willingness and leadership of the professoriate to do so, but here too this capacity also seems to be stalling or moving in the opposite direction. The faculty are resistant to globalization and internationalization despite a couple of decades of efforts and rhetoric to the contrary. Postiglione and Altbach (2013) Green (2008), and Hawkins (2012a) note several studies that report a downward trend in such areas as international research collaboration, joint publishing, hiring of international faculty (with some notable exceptions in Hong Kong and Singapore). Most countries in the region report low percentages of faculty who have taught abroad (less than 10%), the number of international faculty who are invited to join their ranks is low (usually in the single digits), support for branch campuses or other collaborative institutional efforts is minimal, and so on. Again the rhetoric of faculty support for internationalization of their HEIs is high but the reality in terms of the percent of the cohort is low and getting lower.

The standard for claiming to be internationalized HEIs in the Asia Pacific region continues to be the degree of student mobility and the annual increase in those numbers. The case can still be made for a regional annual increase in student mobility but often it is out of context and lacks intellectual rigor. Case study data that digs deep into what these numbers mean continues to be in short supply but increasingly criticism is being leveled at what student mobility has come represent in terms of broader cross-national representation.

Chow and Chambers (2010), deWitt (2010), Lee (2013) and others have presented critiques that focus on the increasing localization of student mobility, its links with income producing areas, its often exploitative nature, its links to what has become a multi-national business venture rather than an enriching pedagogical mission, disturbing racist events, asymmetrical student recruitment, re-emergence of damaging “brain drain”, to name just a few emerging issues. These all suggest a student mobility trajectory that is counter to much of the early hopes of an increasingly enriched, multi-national academic experience coincident with living in a globalized world. It seems to fit into the “insider” model suggested by Ramo (2013) as recruitment of international students appears to be more about satisfying national and local interests than about previous notions of a transformed, international, global university.

**Asian Educational Hubs**

Although the terms global university and internationalized university still are regularly used to describe 21st century HE goals in the US and Asia, as these concepts get murkier and murkier, a new phenomenon has emerged in Asia and elsewhere, which purports to be the next stage of HE transformation as well as a structural mechanism to put HE on a new track to globalization and internationalization.

What exactly is an “educational hub?” Jane Knight, who quite literally (and most recently) has written the book on it (Knight 2014: p. 221) offers the most comprehensive definition: “The term education hub is being used by countries who are trying to build a critical mass of local and foreign actors—including students, education institutions, companies, knowledge industries, science and technology centers—who, thorough interaction and in some cases collocation, engage in education, training, knowledge production, and innovation initiatives.” She and others see this phenomenon as a “third generation” of mobility and migration, in the context of globalization and internationalization, but which in an odd way reflects the movement away from these terms as they have been traditionally thought of. That is, they are essentially nationally located “receiving” mechanisms where the unit of analysis is the country rather than a HEIs or system of HE, or even a city (such as Boston or LA). A hub
involves a “national plan” to attract a critical mass of local and foreign actors to achieve certain specific national level goals. On the surface, they appear to be somewhat opposite of previous notions of “internationalization”.

In Asia, Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong are often cited as more mature examples of what constitutes an ‘education hub’. Singapore’s Global Schoolhouse, Malaysia’s Edutech and KL Education City; and the entire city state of Hong Kong are being studied as examples of this new form of “internationalization”. They have several features in common, but the most significant may be that these new constructs seem to be focused on serving the national political and economic interests of the site in which they are located. Details regarding their goals and objectives can be found in Knight (2011, 2014) but they clearly are a departure from previous notions of globalization and internationalization of higher education.

As one example, in the case of Hong Kong (and to some degree Singapore), the majority of “international students and scholars” are from close neighbors in the region (92.6% of students funded for the Hong Kong hub are from mainland China). As Knight (2011) notes: “With less than 8% coming from other countries in the region one can question whether Hong Kong is serving as a regional hub or perhaps better described as a gateway or bridge to students from the mainland.” P. 229 Much the same could be said for Singapore. In Malaysia there is a clear focus on serving a similar function for Islamic students. The focus on income generation and modernization of domestic industry and technology also represents a change from previous concepts of internationalization and globalization. Knight’s (2011) typology is helpful in making sense of this new development and the three types she identifies (student hubs, skilled workforce hub, knowledge/production hub) all have in common their focus on local/regional national development, as opposed to broader globalization and internationalization goals.

The hub idea has certainly caught on in the region with reports of a widespread rush to establish hubs of various types and motivations, adding further to the lack of clarity as to what exactly they are and how they relate to the concepts of globalization and internationalization. In addition to the frontrunners mentioned above (Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, etc.) government policy announcements about eminent hub development from Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Taiwan, Bhutan, Korea, and Japan have raised several questions: how many regional hubs are feasible in the region; how much of this hub promotion is rhetoric and basically debases the meaning of what constitutes a hub; what is the purpose and motivation for hub development; how much of this is entrepreneurial rather than pedagogical, serving narrow national and business interests rather than the lofty goals of globalization and internationalization celebrated in the early phases of these movements (Sharma 2013; “Education hub” 2013)?

As if to make this discussion of what constitutes a hub even more complex, officials in China have announced that the entire nation of China might be considered a higher education hub seeking to attract the best students in the region (especially in mandarin speaking Asia) to China’s best universities, thus breaking the monopoly held by the West and providing competition to East Asia’s local higher education systems (Iqbal 2011).

Much more work needs to be done on what motivates this rush to establish hubs but just to take two examples of the frontrunners—which often serve as models for others (Hong Kong and Malaysia), in the case of Hong Kong, a study in 2011 outlined three main motivating factors:

- To help form an “education industry”
- To promote one’s own culture by attracting the best scholars and students from the region
- To serve as a “bridge” (e.g. to mainland China), attracting their best students

The authors (Cheng, Cheung, Yeun 2011) suggest that Hong Kong has a major comparative advantage with respect to hub development because of the recent Pearl River Economic Zone project, which expands the HE market for Hong Kong. Hub development appears to be primarily utilitarian and following a privatization business model while exerting “soft power” through culture learning. It is a highly localized and regionalized expression of globalization and internationalization. In this sense, educational hubs add credibility to Ramos’ argument of “insiderization”.

In the case of Malaysia, the motive seems to be clearly economic with an emphasis on increasing capacity such that the government will be able to attract back to Malaysia the 20% of Malaysian students who study abroad, in addition to responding to the regional demand for high quality education. In order to do this, the HE system was opened up so that private HEIs and foreign branch campuses could be established and promoted. This has morphed into a business plan that sees Malaysia becoming a regional HE hub for both domestic and regional students (Blessinger 2012; Cheng, Ming Yu, Amir Mahmood, and Peik Foong Yeap 2013). The emphasis here is on the “demand” side.

These examples as well as other literature on the subject reveal a number of suppositions about hubs that need further
clarification. Kiner and Lane (2013) make note of this need and lack of clarity and suggest that there are at least three assumptions about hubs that need to be challenged: First: educational hubs exist in close proximity to each other. This is not always the case, they point out, in some cases institutions comprising the hub exist throughout a country (the recent example of China). They refer to this form as Archipelago hubs. In contrast, Acropolis hubs are co-located usually in an urban setting. Second: hubs are an expression of governmental strategy.

In fact, a number of quasi and non-governmental agencies, both private and public are involved. What they do hold in common is that they generally serve local interests and represent a turning inward approach to internationalization. Third: hubs are driven by excess domestic and regional demand (i.e. the Malaysia example above). Rather, they argue, they are mostly driven by supply side arguments: “if you build it they will come.” The attraction is to bring the world to you rather than establishing a reciprocal relationship. The hub metaphor remains somewhat muddy.

The discussion of higher educational hubs in Asia and how they relate to internationalization and globalization is wide-ranging, inconclusive, and dynamic, and will undoubtedly continue for some time. One trend is becoming clearer and is best illustrated in the Hong Kong case. A marketing analysis of the nature of educational hubs in Hong Kong suggest that use of the term “glocal” is a more accurate representation of the kind of internationalization that is taking place in higher education in much of Asia. “Current trends suggest that more Asian students prefer to pursue their studies outside their home country, yet within Asia” (“Hong Kong’s allure” 2014, p. 2).

This trend presents a model whereby students believe they are engaged in “internationalization” while they stay close to home, have an international experience by having foreign students come to them, receive a high quality education, and maintain the kind of linkages that turn into career possibilities. The conventional push and pull factors of globalization and internationalization that led to cross national experiences, cultural challenges, and multi-lingualism are partially absent from this model. Going “glocal” represents a significant shift “inward” and thus a new definition of how globalization and internationalization is being expressed.

**Concluding Remarks**

So what do we do about these metaphors? It is at least worth considering that “globalization” applies to almost anything in the current sociology of the world. But it increasingly seems to be a weak concept, undergoing such critical scrutiny that it has been declared dead. While this may be a grand overstatement should these critiques make us ponder and rethink the utility of this metaphor and therefore use it more carefully and analytically when discussing higher education change and development? Might we perhaps use it less and actually try to describe the wide range of experiences that HEIs are undergoing as they encounter both centrifugal and centripetal forces with respect to the world around them (that author has made this argument elsewhere, see Hawkins 2012b)?

It also seems that the term “internationalization” has lost much of its intellectual rigor and we would be wise to dig deeper when declaring that a HEI or higher education system is being internationalized. There is now sufficient evidence that this movement is slowing down and may be going into reverse as HEIs retrench locally to focus on myriad local and national problems often linked closely with economic challenges. What is now called “internationalization” in the US and Asia Pacific often refers to responses that serve national priorities. And within HEIs in these settings, what has been called “borderline” ignorance appears to be on the rise as what internationalization that does occur is generally ghettoized; students across the curriculum do not learn to “think” internationally. New metaphors for this phenomenon have begun to appear (i.e. glocal) but more thought is needed to measure what in fact constitutes “internationalization.”

The structural response of “educational hubs” is in such an early stage and so dynamic, as in changeable, that it bears close scrutiny as well. The boundaries of what constitutes a hub is unclear to the point that some scholars are questioning whether or not they are just fad and will morph into something else in due time. What does seem clear, however, is that they all appear to represent a move “inward”, designed as a business model to serve national developmental interests, as well as preserve local talent while attracting regional talent in a new form of brain drain.

At the very least, I think a takeaway from a discussion of these three terms is that one should be wary of being caught up in these metaphors that are easy to utter but may in fact insulate us from looking more carefully at what is really going on behind the vale of comfortable metaphors. The suggestion is that we stand back and dig deeper on a case by case basis to see more clearly how the transformation of higher education is actually taking place and examine more carefully how the centrifugal and centripetal forces are effecting the tension that has always existed between the national and international missions of higher education. In doing that we may in fact invent some new metaphors that, with time, will also beg to be changed.
REFERENCES


Richard James and Ka Ho Mok, Globalization and Higher Education in East Asia. London: Cavendish Square Publications.

