

Book Review

Neubauer, D.D. & Kuar, S. (eds.) 2019. *Gender and the Changing Face of Higher Education in Asia Pacific*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

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This important fifteen-chapter volume significantly increases our understanding of how gender and higher education interrelate in the Asia Pacific. As the authors suggest, UNESCO and the Asia Development Bank both note the magnitude of gender inequalities and the paucity of systematic understanding of their impact in this region. The book also adds to a global stock of knowledge around gender and higher education, a field which still needs significantly more attention given the magnitude of the problem and the depth, complexity, and consequences of the gender inequalities that are internationally (re)produced through higher education. Chapter 1 explains how the chapters (except for three additional ones produced for the collection by Neubauer, Deng, and Cuthbert) were originally papers presented at a symposium organised by the Asia Pacific Higher Education Research Partnership (APHERP) at Lingnan University, in Hong Kong, SAR on October 2016.

The stimulus paper for the symposium informs Chapter 2 which sets up the context and introduces the themes which the authors were asked to address. Cuthbert, Lee, Deng and Neubauer describe these themes as having been teased out from the diverse, differently developed, and gendered systems of Asia Pacific (e.g. the USA, Australia, India, Bhutan, Taiwan, Cambodia, Malaysia, China, and Singapore). The diversity of the region in relation to access and participation is indicated by the way that South Korea, Japan, China, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines have more females than males enrolled in higher education and Cambodia, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Nepal have more males. However, overall, the chapter presents a wide range of issues familiar to those interested in international and comparative research in gender, feminism and higher education. However, there are three themes (access and participation, horizontal and vertical segregation in academic disciplines, and women and leadership in higher education) which seem to drive the collection.

Systemic inequalities in access and participation are attended to at least in a cursory way but some provide systemic case studies which give a deeper analysis and how the gendered nature of higher education has changed with the growth of massification and the increasing neo-liberalisation of economies in the region. For example, in Chapter 6, Navain explores structural inequalities in the context of a growing student intake in India, (from 10.7 million in 2002 to 32.2 million in 2013) (2019: 73). Many historical factors are seen to have influenced the current gender balance including the growing economic liberalisation but also the commitment to universal education. However, whereas access is a success story (46% of enrolments across the whole of



India), Navain also suggests that initiatives aimed at generating gender equality and equity have had mixed success. For example, women's colleges and universities facilitate women's participation but a growing private sector, which plays a prominent role in lower status and lower quality end of higher education, attract a disproportionate number of women and potentially undermine the effectiveness of participation for women. In addition, rurality, caste, and religion can affect women's participation and there is a leaky pipeline from undergraduate to graduate levels for students. Other systemic analyses by Deng of China (Chapter 7), of Hong Kong, by Li, L.C. and Kam (Chapter 8), of Japan by Li, S. (Chapter 11) and by Yeom on South Korea (Chapter 13) illustrate very some very different contexts and further exemplify the complexity of the region.

In addressing the horizontal and vertical segregation associated with the gendered nature of academic disciplines, authors focus on those from which women are excluded. In Chapter 5, Cuthbert and Sidelil explore the Australian government's push to get women into STEM and illustrate the danger of economic and instrumentalist approaches to gender parity. They fear that as policy moves away from a feminist and social justice agenda it is less likely to, for example, tackle the disproportionate amount of sexual violence experienced by female STEM researchers. They argue that when national initiatives draw upon global policy discourse to position women as resources for the economy, even though there is potential to empower, if women became innovators and drivers of global competition (womenomics), these approaches implicitly ignore and further the inequalities already embedded in the system. For example, sexism, the burden of the double day etc. are a part of STEM disciplines and industries. In Chapter 12 Wang's very interesting chapter and the introduction of a 'vase breaking theory' to describe women technologists experiences as they work their way up academic and employment hierarchies, extends this point. It illustrates how the increasing number of females in technology is not fundamentally challenging patriarchy in Taiwan and shows that women need to gain support and strategies for resistance to survive and succeed as technology has remained patriarchal.

Women and higher education leadership is the biggest theme of the chapters. In Chapter 4, Tang presents documentary research that explores the role of women leaders in five world class universities in five countries and comparatively analyses them. Whilst the lack of female leaders (particularly at institutional level) is stark across all of the universities, the differences between them are also considerable. The differences between the top end (28.9% in Hong Kong University) and at the bottom end (3.5% in Seoul National University) is explained by Tang as being associated with different cultures, disciplinary backgrounds, cultures in universities, gender relations and norms and histories. There are three more chapters on women in leadership: both in Chapter 9 Kaur and Chapter 10 Jamil, Firdaus, Shabudin, Raman and Ling, focus on Malaysia case studies, and in Chapter 14 Buasuwan and Niyamajan explore the glass ceiling in Thai higher education.

This book is very welcome and insightful. The tables, figures, statistics, and comparisons made will be widely used. It would have been nice to have a more systematic exploration of the theorisations of gender inequalities coming out of the countries explored and from a non-western perspective. However, whilst there were some chapters responding to some aspects of

this (which was called for in Chapter 2), this is hopefully the topic for another volume on gender and higher education in Aisa Pacific.

Reviewed by

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