

ULASAN BUKU/BOOK REVIEW

Internationalizing Higher Education in Malaysia – Understanding, Practices and Challenges, by Tham Siew Yean (ed.) Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), 2013, 139 pp.

Nine well-known academics in the Malaysian higher education scene contributed seven chapters in this 147-page book. These nine academics with background ranging from sociology, economics and education have adopted a multi-disciplinary style and approach to the analysis of internationalisation in Malaysia. While the authors are flirting with policy imperatives for internationalisation in Malaysia (on p. 9, the authors claimed that the book also aims to make policy recommendations), the book was not written from a policy perspective. On the contrary, the book was written from the perspective of academic discourse, raising issues relevant for policy rather than policy prescription. This is understandable as none of the authors have access to policy documents to provide policy context to their discussion and analysis. Admittedly, there are other considerations involved in policy prescriptions, and we must not naively assume that these will be purely based on empirical findings. Evidence-based policy does not happen quite often in policy formulation. This is very true in the case of higher education policy.

This book was written based on findings from a research project that examined challenges arising from the internationalisation of higher education in Malaysia. The authors present the rationales, practices and challenges arising from internationalisation in the Malaysian higher education scene with specific detail and evidence that appeal to readers' desire to understand the processes and consequences of internationalisation to Malaysian higher education institutions. The authors use explanation and analysis to present internationalisation and its consequences at both the macro and micro levels, which help readers understand the connection between the macro and the micro elements in institutional practices in relation to internationalisation of higher education. Reading through the discussion and analysis, it would be worthwhile to read this book together with important work on internationalisation undertaken by the National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN) based at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang. In so doing, readers will have a comprehensive understanding of issues relating to internationalisation in Malaysia.

It is important to explore some of the issues the book raises. For instance, while it is true that internationalisation as practiced by many private higher education institutions serve the economic needs of the institutions and ultimately Malaysia, internationalisation has an important role to play in creating an open-minded Malaysian society. These possibilities have not been fully explored in the book. Internationalisation at home is another important issue that needs further investigation and this aspect was not sufficiently examined in the book. But it is

an emerging issue in so far as how curriculum is designed and courses offered in higher education institutions in Malaysia.

The concluding chapter is worth mentioning as it is a serious attempt by the authors to relate study's findings to policy issues. While it is generally perceived that Key Performance Indicators (KPI) are about quantity or numbers of international students coming to Malaysia to continue their studies (and these are translated as income for Malaysia) of late outcomes of such internationalisation programmes have been the subject of serious discussion among policy-makers. Quantity of international students in the local landscape may not be the ultimate KPI for long.

As an academic now involved in formulating and implementing strategic policies relating to higher education in Malaysia I found the book very rich in empirical data for further analysis with a view towards the formulation of appropriate policy responses and interventions. But policy formulation environment is highly complex, and empirical data do not provide all the answers needed for effective policy prescriptions. Thus it is important that policy makers review the empirical findings as reported in this book and translate these into some form of evidence-based policy interventions in the context of the policy environment and regulations now in place.

The book will be of interest to researchers as the findings complement the findings of other studies on internationalisation of Malaysian higher education. It is accurate in its interpretation of events and very objective in its analysis of data. The book enriches our knowledge on one aspect of higher education in Malaysia, which may contribute to our competitiveness. But the book is also suitable for undergraduates and even the general public who are interested in the rationales for internationalisation, and the institutional practices that have resulted in the influx of international students in Malaysia. The authors' writing style is not too technical; there is coherence and clarity in the writings. The title describes accurately the content of the book and the various chapters are organised and developed in a logical sequence that aid understanding of the issues involved. On this count, the book has achieved its intended objective and goal.

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