



Inter-Asian Connections II: Singapore

CALL FOR WORKSHOP PAPERS

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WORKSHOP TITLE:

Regional Knowledge Hubs in Asia: the Social Sciences and Humanities in Science and Technology Human Capital (STHC)

WORKSHOP DIRECTORS:

V.V. Krishna

National University of Singapore

Vkrishna16@hotmail.com; arivvk@nus.edu.sg

Tim Turpin

University of Western Sydney

t.turpin@uws.edu.au

Global competitiveness is dependent on the capacity of economies to acquire knowledge capital and to apply new knowledge through a highly trained and specialised workforce. The term ‘knowledge-based’ or ‘learning economy’ has emerged to describe those economies in which the production, distribution and use of knowledge are the main drivers of growth, wealth creation and employment across all industrial sectors. The concept of a knowledge-based economy has sometimes been used to make a contrast between so called ‘new’ economies based on new technologies, from ‘old’ economies based on long established products and process.

However, a knowledge-based economy is not simply one that emphasises new technologies or even new knowledge. A knowledge-based economy is one in which all sectors are knowledge intensive, are responsive to new ideas and technological change, are innovative, and employ highly skilled personnel engaged in on-going learning. In short, knowledge and skills have to be useable and used in the production of all manner of goods and services.¹

Our conceptualization of a knowledge hub is that it comprises an ensemble of knowledge-intensive organisations located in both public and private sectors. Some are research-intensive knowledge producers, such as research institutes or universities. Others are demanding knowledge users, including firms but also service providers such as hospitals. The knowledge-users provide a focus for knowledge-generation, transmission and diffusion. Producers and users are closely connected and, while spatial proximity is important, they do not have to be physically co-located. Moreover, because of their social and economic characteristics, knowledge hubs draw on the social sciences and humanities in the course of their development.

Knowledge hubs have three key functions. They *generate* new basic knowledge of relevance to many industries, both old and new. The impact of this knowledge is not necessarily direct, nor immediate. But it is influential. In addition, they also generate applied knowledge that is directly and immediately relevant to local industries. Secondly, knowledge hubs capture (and participate in creating) knowledge generated elsewhere, nationally or internationally, and develop this further to meet specific local needs. A third function is to *transmit* knowledge through educational institutions such as universities and schools but also through life-long learning processing that

¹ OECD, *Cities and Regions in the New Learning Economy*, OECD, Paris 2001, p. 11.



involve firms, community based institutions and a variety of government agencies and services including hospitals, clinics and professional associations.

With the rapid economic development of the Chinese and Indian economies and the growth of the newly industrialized Asia economies, there is evidence of newly emerging knowledge hubs across the Asia region. In some cases these are concentrated in specific fields such as biotechnology or ICT in Singapore. In others there is evidence of a relocation of existing knowledge hubs in areas such as mining technologies moving from North America to Australia and South Africa. However, we understand very little about the dynamics behind this process, or the way different disciplines, especially the social sciences and humanities, intersect through the process and the implications for national innovation systems.

This gives rise to four key questions to be addressed by the workshop. (1) Does the movement of science and technology human capital precede or follow such developments? (2.) What is the role of social science and humanities researchers in STHC? (3) How important is the local availability of personnel in anchoring a newly emerging knowledge hub? (4) What are the institutional imperatives for supporting such development? (and (5) in what ways are newly emerging hubs remaining linked to other global centres of knowledge?

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