

ASIAN PERSPECTIVES IN THE IDEA OF A WORLD UNIVERSITY

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University is an institution is a part of an educational system and as such it cannot be taken in isolation. In our approach we shall keep this fact in mind and try to develop the idea of Asian World University. We shall ask first of all, how we can define an Asian world university. Of course a university is an institution of higher learning as such it may be viewed to be the same in everywhere. I am not going to contest this idea. I shall rather accept it but try to develop a larger framework that may also include regional possibilities. In order to explain this I would like to argue that a university may have universal values that are the same everywhere; on the other hand it may have local values that may not be the same everywhere. If the former aspect of universities may be identified as “the uniform aspect” (of universities); the latter can be identified as “the local aspect”. The uniform aspect springs from our human system which is also universal; the local aspect on the other hand springs from our social, psychological, cultural and other environmental dealings. If we justify this claim then we can argue justifiably for the possibility of Asian world universities. This possibility is a mission of our conference and that is why in order to cherish this idea I shall attempt at developing it.

My first attempt is to show our educational theory as based on a philosophy of education, which reveals five stages of learning: 1. the early education which is preschool education when things concerning our everyday life is learned in a somewhat initial systematic learning; 2. Elementary Education which is concerned with the worldview of the individual; 3. Middle Education is concerned with the Knowledge Structure within the worldview of the individual; 4. Higher Education is concerned with developing the Scientific Conceptual Scheme within the Knowledge Structure, and finally; 5. Graduate Education aims at developing the Specific Scientific Conceptual Scheme and as such it is the stage where more attention is paid for the

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specialization.¹ The last two stages concern us here as they deal with the higher education. But I need to elaborate briefly all the stages in order to clarify how one comes to this stage.

First of all in the early education the individual is prepared for the early schooling and taught the cultural elements in which knowledge should occupy a special place. This way every person knows that learning is significant. At this stage the home environment and what the parents do is very important. I believe that it is at this stage that the person is motivated to do what s/he wants to do later in life and as such it determines for the most part the person's tendency to develop though somewhat unconsciously and naturally his/her leaning for a career in life. It may play a significant role to develop the person's inherent ability for whatever it may be.

Secondly, the individual is ready for the Elementary Education when s/he has a solid Life Structure in mind. "Life Structure" is the network of ideas and notions whether as moods in one's state of mind or as doctrines, ideas and concepts in one's mind which plays a fundamental basis in his/her everyday behavior. Since this stage of development in an individual's educational venture corresponds to the Stage of Worldview at this stage of education only elements that make up the basic structure of the individual's worldview must be given. Special techniques should be developed to the teaching of his/her worldview. The curriculum should also be developed on the basis of that worldview. There is no need to teach basic sciences. This is perhaps where Asian consciousness is to be taught. It is this consciousness that will play a vital role in the university education.

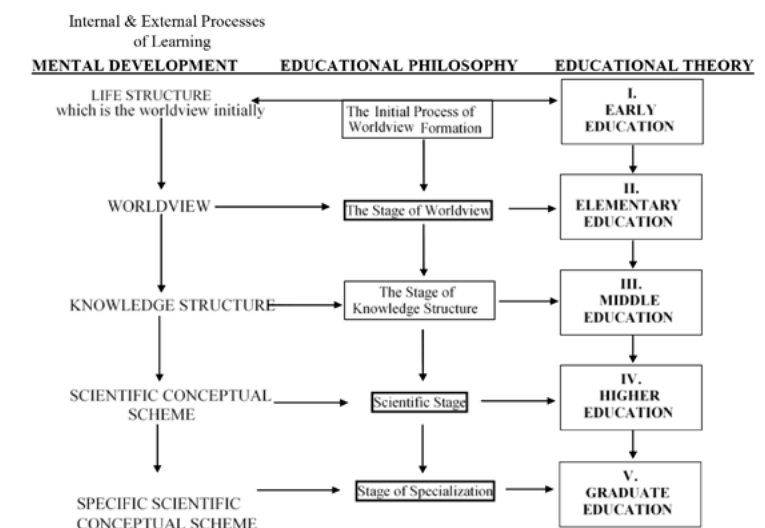
In the Third Stage the Knowledge Structure of the individual's worldview is given. "Knowledge Structure" in a worldview corresponds to one's understanding of knowledge and all other related concepts and notions, all of which cluster coherently in the mind of the individual. We need to elaborate this because it is crucial for an educational theory as it is basically an act of acquiring knowledge. Also it is this stage that prepares the student for higher education. In the Knowledge Structure of a worldview there are concepts that provide a mentality to the individual. These concepts are held in unity under the umbrella concept "knowledge" which thus acquires a doctrinal character. Other related concepts in this unity are science, truth, falsehood, opinion, belief, certainty, method, theory, understanding, doubt and so on. All these concepts are well formed and harmonized together so well that

¹ I am presenting my ideas concerning our philosophy education as a basis of an educational theor in a summary form. For details see my article "Challenges and New Trends in Higher Education", *Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Issues and Challenges*, ed. Abdulla Y. Al-Hawaj, Wajeeh Elali and E. H. Twizell (Boca Raton, London, New York: CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 29-46.

their unity projects an understanding called "knowledge mentality". As such it projects one's understanding of knowledge, method and truth together with their significance. The student learns with this mentality that knowledge is valuable and that one needs knowledge in life.

Also the student finds out that knowledge acquired with special method is called "science". The application of science is technology and so on. Of course the way these propositions are put here may be expressed in different ways in every worldview. There is just one common characteristic in all worldviews here; they all have a specific Knowledge Structure of their own. When this structure is well developed in the minds of the students then they find out what to do with knowledge. Those who are still interested in the same type of systematic knowledge will continue for higher education where they will begin to learn all sciences in a general way. Hence, we arrive at the Fourth Stage which is the stage of Higher Education. The approach at this stage should be interdisciplinary so that the student learns about all the sciences in a general way but in later years of this stage they drift to a more particular area which will eventually become their area of expertise.

After the student graduates from this level which corresponds to what we call today the bachelor's degree s/he continues for deeper specialization in graduate studies which represents the Fifth and final stage of our educational theory. I may argue that what I have tried to develop so far may represent the uniform aspect of education and as university is conceived in this process as a universal institution. I shall now try to develop the local aspect of universities but before I may continue I would like to summarize the whole educational process on the following table.



Our philosophy of education then assigns the value of scientific knowledge to the universities, which belongs to it as one universal aspect. This springs, as we have tried to show from our nature as a human being. Of course this has epistemological implications but we need not discuss it here.² In fact any universal aspect of universities that may be given as main characteristics of universities must belong to this aspect of humanity. In that case those characteristics of universities that may be given as local aspect also belong to our nature but they spring from our social, cultural and psychological nature. We must be careful in this respect; for, I do not attribute the local characteristics in this case to social and cultural environment. I rather would like to emphasize that these features belong to our nature (*fitrah*) as primarily a being who is social by nature and who is inclined to produce a culture by nature. In other words, we are social by our nature and we *form* or *construct* a culture because our nature is conducive to this behavior. The only important point here is that the social, cultural and psychological aspects of our nature lead to differences between societies and because of this fact our educational activities may also hold differences. If we attribute these differences to our society and culture as well then we may speak of different approach in the idea of an Asian world university. Let us now discuss what those differences may be.

In the first place there will be common and comprehensive courses for all departments about the Asian community, its history, culture and civilization. This will provide a perspective to all the graduates of this university. A uniform perspective is important for the Asian values but it is not a determining factor in scientific and scholarly issues so that it does not become a bias. The common features of Asian civilizations will be expressed vividly in the minds of the students. These common features reflect universal human values such as tolerance for differences, understanding; above all multi ethnicity, religion and culturalism.

These courses should be designed efficiently and named according to its area. For example, in each department the courses may be followed in the following order:

1. Three courses at introductory level in the main area of the student (9 crds.);
2. Three required courses in the sub-fields of the student (9 crds.);
3. Five elective courses in the related fields of the student (15 crds.);
4. Two course in Asian history (6 crds.);
5. Two courses in Asian civilizations (6 crds.);

² For a somewhat detailed discussion of this see Alparslan Açıkgenç, *Scientific Thought and its Burdens* (Istanbul: Fatih University Press, 2000), chapter 1.

6. One course on the concept, values and philosophy of Asian community (3 crds.);
7. One course on the sociology of the Asian community (3 crds.);
8. Two courses in the scientific traditions of Asian community (6 crds.);
9. Two courses in the methodology of scientific traditions of Asian community (6 crds.);
10. Two courses in the philosophy and ethics of scientific traditions of Asian community (6 crds.);
11. The rest are elective courses (51-60 crds.).

The logic of this curriculum is that there will be some introductory courses in every area of study as required by human knowledge system. Therefore, this logic is followed in every world university. The number of these introductory courses may change but in general three such courses would be adequate in every area. This is because three sub-field courses compliment any deficiency with respect to the introductory level knowledge of the field. Then five required courses in the sub-fields of the student who is left free to choose any sub-field will compliment his/her knowledge of the related sub-fields. The student shall choose the courses according to his/her interest in the field in order to decide for specialization. The courses required in Asian studies will make this university an Asian world university. These courses will be 30 credits altogether and they are designed to give the students sufficient knowledge of all Asian community history, civilization and culture. This way the student becomes knowledgeable in various Asian cultures and Asian identity. The rest of the courses may be local requirements and other elective courses that may be up to 60 credits.

The main issue in this curriculum is the design of the content of Asian courses: I propose here that Asian Philosophical Association carry the mission of leadership in the design of these courses. But we should mainly aim at the following points in the attempt to organize different NGO's and policy makers for this purpose:

1. The courses should reflect scientific traditions of the world community on the one hand and that of the Asian community on the other;
2. They should reflect Asian modesty and values;
3. The content of the courses should not be filled with unnecessary appraisal and historical flattery of Asian community;
4. Scientific integrity and ethical norms must have their due attention;
5. The courses should reflect Asian tolerance and pluralism;

6. The students should not be burdened by unnecessary information about history, wars and cultural biases;
7. The Asian courses should attract the students' attention in such a way that they should be interesting, exciting and motivating;
8. Above all the courses should be designed in such a way to show the students the vital significance of peace and human dignity.

We hope that this way the Asian courses will lead the students to an understanding of peace and tolerance. The most critical point is to keep academic integrity and scholarly honesty as the marks of objective approach in scientific issues. For, we believe that scientific objectivity consists in having a sincere attitude and genuine effort for truth. Otherwise, it does not mean leaving one's own perspective or stand point unless it turns out to be wrong. Even in such a case since the earnest aspire of a scholar is truth earnestness in the attainment of truth will prevent him from keeping a wrong perspective. In any case the Asian perspectives are set already for high human values and dignity, which may never fail to be true.

What we have presented here is a tentative approach to the idea of an Asian world university. The concepts used in the name of this university fulfill the function of our first ICAPA conference in Istanbul when the concept of "glocalism" was addressed. On the one hand, the concept of "Asia" in the name represents "the local" perspective; but as I have tried to develop in this paper the universal character of the university is, on the other hand, represented by the concept "world" in the name of the idea of an Asian World University. We hope that the ICAPA conferences will be the proper ground to develop both perspectives in the name of universal human endeavor to form an idea of Glocal University. This university will represent an overarching approach to multidisciplinary studies in all fields that does not neglect human condition as an Asian world approach.