

Regional Challenges in Education for East Asia and Oceania

Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities in East Asia and Oceania (AJCU-EAO)

Introduction

The Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities in East Asia and Oceania (AJCU-EAO) in the most recent meeting in Australia last September 2009, confirmed that the education ministry of the Society of Jesus in the region continues to be important and relevant, especially in the context of the cultural diversity of the region and recent developments in the world, more particularly in the field of education. In this meeting, thirteen Jesuit member-institutions from seven countries particularly discerned on two main points: (1) how to deepen our awareness and understanding of our identity and (2) how to forge close collaboration between and among the members.

As they challenged themselves to look for a distinguishing identity aside from the mission of the Society, they shared their experiences, difficulties, disappointments, successes and hopes for the future. While they found similar circumstances in some of their schools, their discernment and sharing focused more on their diversity. Indeed, the AJCU-EAO schools are so diverse that they run parallel to each other and disconnected in concretizing the Jesuit mission rather than convergent and coordinated.

For instance, the majority of their schools are situated in countries where Catholics constitute less than two percent of the population: China and Japan where Buddhism, if not atheism, prevails; Indonesia which is a bastion of Islam; and Vietnam where Confucianism is virtually a state religion. In South Korea, half of the population does not practice any religion. Only the Philippines and Australia are predominantly Catholic, but are seriously challenged by other religions, sects, and by rising secularization.

Ironically indeed, Christianity today seems to be a countercultural force in Asia where it actually started. The Society and the Catholic Church, in general, still experience difficulties similar to those of the early missionaries in trying to bring Christianity to Asia. In Vietnam, religious practices and documents are still subject to surveillance. In China, the government is still suspicious of the Catholic Church's obedience to the Pope and therefore strategizes to split the clergy and congregations off from Rome; its Communist Party still considers the Catholic religion an international threat that advances the "imperialism" or "capitalism" of the West. In Indonesia, Catholicism and other minority religions also have their share of government restrictions. In fact, Pope Benedict XVI has complained of state governments suffocating the Catholics' practice of religion. But this is a situation that the members of the Society had been warned of to expect: difficult challenges and inconvenient working conditions. As Jesuits, in collaboration with the laity and

others, they are called to live with these creative tensions as part of their commitment to the mission.

Hence, many Jesuits and their partners in mission, as other Catholic missionaries today, need to put the proclamation of Jesus the Christ on the back burner, in favor of a quiet personal witness to His sustaining presence and love as they provide long-term education to diverse peoples with conscious care and sensitivity to local cultures and religions. This quiet witness is a part of their driving brand of Ignatian spirituality, which they willingly share with those who would partake of it, and quite different from the Ignatian spirituality that drives public, and oftentimes courageous, proclamation and prophecy in societies where Christianity has long taken historical root.

Even in the Philippines, where at least 85 percent belong to the Catholic Church, three Jesuit institutions are situated where there are overwhelmingly diverse cultures. Even if Catholics still make up the majority of their population, they are challenged to co-exist harmoniously with the Bangsamoro and Lumad peoples and other indigenous groups through inter-faith and inter-cultural meeting. In the process, the local traditions which are often not consistent with the Catholic faith militate against evangelization.

The Jesuits in the Philippines and in Australia work freely in proclaiming the Christian faith. However, they are challenged to exert more felt formative impact on their peoples' religiosity and spirituality.

Further, the diversity of environments can also be appreciated in terms of development. Some Jesuits, especially in highly developed societies such as China, Japan and South Korea, run schools on vast resources and sophisticated technology. The Ateneos outside Manila in the Philippines, on the other hand, are challenged to create programs that are sensitive to the poverty and other local problems in their respective regions. Some schools are almost always assured of strong enrolment, while others are struggling to survive. There is notable economic disparity between rich and poor Jesuit schools in the region.

With development, however, come forces which are antithetical to spiritual formation. Among these are secularization and commercialization. In the face of these problems, Pope Benedict XVI in 2006 reminded the fathers and brothers of the Society to continue to "dialogue with modern culture" which is heavily characterized by materialism. Alongside materialism are controversial moral issues like premarital sex, contraception, suicide, among others, which confront the youth in most countries. Here, Jesuit schools' formation programs are put to serious test. Though the growing interest of the lay coworkers in the Jesuit education mission can be an important advancement, other schools in AJCU-EAO are dominated by non-Catholic faculty and administrators without and Ignatian Formation orientation. To add to this problem, the number of Jesuits, on whom lay coworkers

might rely for enlightenment or inspiration through Jesuit and Ignatian Spirituality, is on a steady decline.

Against these challenges, however, are solid educational achievements of the AJCU-EAO members. Many Jesuit schools in East Asia and Oceania are recognized to be education leaders in their own areas and in various fields, social sciences and philosophy, technology and research, among others: Sophia University is one of the top international schools in Japan; the Ateneo de Manila University was recently recognized as the top Filipino school in the world, while the other Ateneos stand out in their respective regions; Sogang University takes pride in its being a research University and one of Korea's top international schools; ATMI is a benchmark in technical education in Indonesia, to name a few.

Some Jesuits, as in China and Australia, operate in schools that are not Jesuit, but nonetheless impact positively on the educational or intellectual apostolate.

The environment also shapes the institutional priorities and specializations of each of the Jesuit schools in the association. For instance, due to prevailing religious and cultural conflicts, the Ateneos in Southern Philippines integrate interfaith and intercultural dialogue into their curricula in their institutional commitment to peace. Sanata Dharma, with its large Muslim population, likewise works seriously on inter-religious dialogue. Sophia University, given the technology and research capacity of Japan, utilizes much of its resources in tackling environmental problems. Sogang University effectively models internationalization largely in the climate of freedom in South Korea.

Meanwhile, reflection on how the differing environments impact differently on Jesuit schools feed into an ever-deepening understanding of Jesuit identity and mission in the region.

Discussion

With the desire of the Society of Jesus to continue providing Jesuit education to the highly diverse region of East Asia and Oceania, some of the challenges AJCU-EAO needs to address to remain faithful to the Jesuit education ministry are as follows.

I. Cultural and linguistic diversity

East Asia and Oceania has always been multicultural. The diversity in the region of ancient religions, cultures, languages, and practices is palpable. Even peoples within single nations exhibit differing socio-cultural make-ups. This defining character of the region is heightened by globalization. Already diverse local populations are challenged by "others" more easily crossing porous borders in a global world and disturbing hard-won balances among locally diverse peoples.

In this culturally heterogeneous environment, each group of people sharing the same values and traditions needs recognition and respect from other groups with different cultural orientations. Failure to provide such recognition— wittingly or unwittingly – leads to misunderstanding, miseducation, distrust, conflict and violence.

From the perspective of Jesuit education providers in the region, this multicultural reality presents a formidable challenge of how to best advance the distinct Catholic and Jesuit character of their education with deep respect for those in their areas belonging to different cultures and traditions. The Jesuit education institutions (JEIs) have then the responsibility to instill among the students an openness to the substance and practices of the other cultures, an ability to enter into multiple rationalities, grasp them and understand them, without losing sight of their original moorings in their own culture.

In another light, JEIs can in fact take on the challenge of promoting and nurturing a way of life that best promotes the harmonious co-existence of multiple cultures. That can be considered a new model of Jesuit education in a multicultural world. Its goal: education that liberates from any narrow, myopic and exclusive view of the world and one that leads to a more embracing, open and universal one. This model can be considered an appropriation of the “Ignatian sense of breadth of belonging and wideness of concern and responsibility”¹, which was succinctly articulated recently in Manila by Fr. General Adolfo Nicolas.

Fr. Nicolas encourages everyone involved in the promotion and delivery of Jesuit education to take on a more universal approach to Ignatian spirituality by creating an atmosphere where personal or familial or even national concerns are considered alongside, and not over and above, the concern for the others who do not share the same lineage, nationality, and culture. The key is finding a common ground despite all the stark differences, looking for the tie that binds and giving primacy and respect due it.

“Universities have a role to play in promoting inclusive multiculturalism and universal values. This has become even more significant given the greater polarization of communities and religions around the region and the world. Student and academic mobility and exchange can serve to share a greater sense of cross-cultural understanding and tolerance.”²

¹ ARP N Adolfo Nicolas, S.J., “On the Challenges and Issues in Jesuit Education.” On the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary of Jesuit Education in the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University, 13 July 2009.

² Molly N.N. Lee and Stephen Healy, Higher Education in Southeast Asia, (Thailand: UNESCO, 2006) 11.

Jesuit universities as Catholic universities must also take on the challenge of carrying out the “fundamental role as mediators in inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue “. ³

In this context, worthy to note is the fact that several Jesuit universities have already taken on the fundamental role of mediators. Ateneo de Zamboanga University (ADZU) has formulated and is already implementing its peace curriculum. It continues to spearhead interreligious dialogue between Muslims and Christians to address perennial conflicts brought about by deep-seated cultural biases. ⁴

In Indonesia, Sanata Dharma University believes that “[t]he heart of dialogue with Islam is to come to know people who are different from us”⁵. And this strong belief leads its theological faculty to arrange visits to Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). The visits allowed them to see and respect the different faces of Islam.

The Thai-Burma Project is another concrete illustration of an inclusive multicultural initiative. It includes all ethnic groups (who may even have historical tensions), without prejudice to cultural differences. ⁶ The project capitalizes on education as an instrument to address the socio-cultural cleavages of and the various injustices experienced by the beneficiaries.

Another phenomenon, which even intensified the already multicultural environment in the region, is globalization. The multicultural community in the region even became more complex with the entry of foreign peoples. The inevitable interdependence— political, economic, social, even cultural— between states created by globalization may have the consequent effect of muting the fundamental national values of peoples. The traditionally strong and unflinching allegiance to one’s country is pitted against a leveling common culture of highly globalized world. This scenario deserves closer evaluation and more intense discernment of academicians, especially those whom may share Jesuit concerns for respecting cultures.

It is a well-recognized sociological reality that the educational institutions have an overwhelming potential to shape nationalistic or patriotic values of the people, considering that an individual spends most of his formative years in school.

³ “The Education Challenge: Catholic Universities in Asia and Oceania.” Fides News Series. 15 November 2008: 2. Agenzia Fides. 28 November 2009.
<www.fides.org/eng/documents/Dossier_Unv_3Asia_eng.doc>

⁴ Ateneo de Zamboanga University’s Reply to the AJCU-EAO Questionnaire.

⁵ Heru Prakosa SJ, “Looking into the many faces of Islam”, 3 December 2009,
<<http://www.jceao.net/june-2009-issue/looking-many-faces-islam>>

⁶ Minutes of AJCU-EAO 2009 Annual Meeting, 5.

However, schools are not organized according to nationalistic norms, and therefore commonly accept a foreign presence in the studentry and faculty. In fact, some schools even encourage a greater influx of foreign students and academicians in line with programs of internationalization. Sometimes, however, because the school's focus is directed towards a more globally-competitive, skills-driven education, this results in a rather bland engagement of the school in developing nationalistic individuals and potential national leaders who can contribute to national development.

This context may also lead to a conflict between preserving the role of educational institutions as instruments in strengthening the nationalistic ideals of the people in a given country and the need to be adaptable and welcoming to foreign cultures brought about by the influx of foreign students and faculty. The role of Jesuit educational institutions here can be reflected on.

Corollary to the multicultural reality in the region, differences in language also prove to be another challenge to educational institutions. Addressing differences in culture is already a major challenge in itself. But this is aggravated even more by the lack of a unifying language. This forestalls better understanding and more effective communication among the peoples. It also hinders greater collaboration between and among institutions, as our experience in AJCU-EAO corroborates.

The multicultural environment in the region also poses a critical danger to succumb to secularization, which apparently and superficially addresses the religious differences among the students (and the faculty). This creates a tension between the desire to insulate the Catholic identity from the threats of secularization and the marked tendency to secularize as a result of the global trend to internationalize.

To address this problem, the region can capitalize on cross-cutting viewpoints such as the high regard for community or interpersonal relationships and the open and cordial dialogue between believers and scientists (in the discourse between Theology and Science).⁷

II. Government-academe relations

The operations, directionality and character of any private higher education institutions are substantially influenced by the degree and extent of the state or government regulation. For obvious reasons, public universities and colleges are under the direct control of the state in all levels of its existence, from the funding, expenditure, curriculum and student admission. On the other hand, the state's governing policies in relation to private higher institutions vary across countries in the region.

⁷ Minutes of AJCU-EAO 2009 Annual Meeting, 10.

In developing countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines, “state regulations place conditions on the establishment and operation of non-state educational institutions that limit their degree of market freedom”.⁸

For instance, the Philippines’ Commission on Higher Education (CHED), despite its constitutional mandate to exercise *reasonable* supervision and regulation over private higher education institutions, has of late, maintained a more authoritative posture, whose policies are determined more by political expediency or by an insatiable drive towards centralization, rather than by rationality. This is illustrated in the recent controversy where the CHED capped tuition fee increases, regardless of the effect on the administration of the private schools. It is illustrated as well in an announcement by CHED that it shall be harmonizing all accreditation activities in the country, to date a predominantly private and voluntary concern, and shall prescribe the requirements of accreditation in detail. It is also illustrated in CHED’s organization of private higher educational institutions into regional and national organizations which are theoretically voluntary. However, CHED has made grant of scholarship and research funds contingent on active participation in these new entities. Here, the *reasonable* is lost.

The highhandedness of CHED in the Philippines under the current leadership is contrasted with the liberal manner with which the Indonesian government deals with private education. Sanata Dharma University says: “The government treats the private education sector as a respected partner.” Jesuit universities in the Philippines and in Indonesia receive but modest help from their governments.

“In China, the higher educational market is heavily regulated by government with free entry permitted only to the second-tier segment of *minban* (literally means, people-run) universities. Similarly, the tightly governed educational market in Vietnam is only open in the university segment that is people-funded.”⁹ However, as observed by Loyola University Chicago in Vietnam, the country’s stance towards private higher education is quite open despite the existing restriction against the Catholic Church to get involved in education.¹⁰

Taiwan has a different experience, in the sense that the relaxation of market restrictions after 1996 created conditions that led to the unprecedented expansion of higher education institutions.¹¹ However, there is a state policy in Taiwan which militates against the desire of Fu Jen Catholic University to provide their students

⁸ Lee and Neubauer, 40.

⁹ Lee and Neubauer, 40..

¹⁰ Vietnam’s Reply to AJCU-EAO Questionnaire.

¹¹ Lee and Neubauer, 40..

with Catholic if not Jesuit formation, since the institution does not have the freedom to choose the students it admits. It is the policy of the government that education institutions, ranked according to performance, are assigned their students according to the ranked results of their performance in state-administered college aptitude exams. This leads to a situation where the students do not really have appreciation for the particular mission or vision of their university beyond its performance ranking.

In Japan, government maintains an open and liberal stance towards private higher education institutions, particularly Catholic universities, as shown by the grant of financial subsidies, respect for religious freedom and the right of the university to provide religious education.

Given the varying degrees of state-regulations, the challenge for the Jesuit institutions is to comply with the requirements of the government, adapt to eventually restrictive policies, and when possible, influence policy-making towards a policy environment that respects not quality delivery of academic and professional instruction but also promotes and celebrates the full humanity of each individual student.

The networking that the latter involves may involve the AJCU-EAO. To date, however, there is no case of where the AJCU-EAO has made a statement on the relationship between the State and any of its member schools.

III. Fiscal challenge

As a consequence of the generally increasing demand for higher education, countries not only in East Asia and Oceania but also in other parts of the world have widened the space for more private entities to share with the government in the delivery of education as a public good. This trend has also generated more demands for accountability and quality assurance systems.

The so-called massification of education requires the various higher education institutions to put in place mechanisms to maintain high academic standards. "Meanwhile, higher education institutions [in general] are required to improve their administrative efficiency and accountability in response to the demands of stakeholders, such as government, business, industry and labor organizations."¹²

Among the less-developed countries in Southeast Asia, where some of the members-institutions are located, "higher educational systems are chronically under-funded

¹² Ka Ho-Mok. Education Reform and Education Policy in East Asia. 1 December 2009. <<http://books.google.com.ph/books>>

and face escalating demand, underqualified academic staff and poorly-planned curricula, thus poorly taught students”¹³.

In this context, some Jesuit institutions find themselves confronted by the difficult challenge to manage their limited resources to comply with the quality assurance requirements of either government-initiated or private accrediting systems.

While the state universities receive funding from their respective governments, most private higher institutions (Jesuit schools included) rely heavily, among others, on tuition fees, donations, and other entrepreneurial activities for their operational, research and other developmental expenditures. Within the region, only the countries of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan receive government subsidies.¹⁴ “Japanese private universities receive as much as 25% of their budget through public subsidies, but in turn they are subjected to tight governmental regulations on the size of their student enrollments and the types of academic programs they can offer.”¹⁵ However, as shared by Elizabeth University of Music (EUM), they, along with other private universities/colleges in Japan, receive government subsidy, which covers only 20% of personnel expenses.¹⁶

The accrediting institutions and the state itself impose substantial requirements on the private universities in order to maintain the desired quality of education, In so doing, a great deal of improvements on various aspects— faculty and instruction, physical structures, research, faculty development, service to the community, and others— need to be financed. The limited financial resources of some Jesuit schools get in the way of institutionalizing these required improvements, to the detriment of their operations and the quality of education they offer.

A possible response to this predicament would be to study how considerable resources among Jesuit institutions (not all financial) might be pooled and shared according to mission.

IV. The changing global and regional landscape

a. The downside of internationalization

¹³ Molly N.N. Lee and Stephen Healy, ed. Higher Education in Southeast Asia, (Thailand: UNESCO, 2006) 10 November 2009. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/0001465/146541e.pdf>.

¹⁴ Molly Lee and Diane E. Neubauer. “Redefining Public and Private in Asia Pacific Higher Education”, Higher Education in Asia/Pacific, (New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2009) 37.

¹⁵ Lee and Neubauer, 42.

¹⁶ Reply by Elizabeth University of Music to AJCU-EAO Questionnaire, December 1, 2009.

Internationalization of education became a buzzword for most education specialists, education policy-makers and the academic community as an offshoot of globalization. Globalization led to the creation of a knowledge-based economy and education then became a very important tool in the attainment of a fairly globally competitive workforce. Due to these shifts in the international and national order, the education sector experiences actual and imminent threats.

From the secular viewpoint, internationalization created a heightened transnational mobility among students and academicians. This fluid flow of people across borders occasioned a corresponding change in the priorities, thrusts and directionalities of most, if not all universities in the region. This also created pressures on them to assimilate some practices of Western Universities in internationalizing their institutions. In doing so, the local or national goals of academic institutions have been revisited, at times, forced to give way to the goals of internationalization, lest negative implications be experienced by the institution. Many countries “stress the importance of higher education institutions in maintaining the countries’ national competitiveness in a globalized knowledge economy”.¹⁷

More and more, educational institutions are evaluated according to the standards acceptable to strong and well-established universities. This creates a pressure on the part of the smaller universities to institutionalize reforms to conform to acceptable international standards. Some of the smaller universities are not yet prepared, administratively and financially to take on this challenge without external help.

The UNESCO Convention of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific was formulated in 1984 to respond to the need to create an environment of strong cooperation among students, faculty and other education providers. This Convention seeks to institutionalize mutual recognition of academic outputs among signatory states.¹⁸ As of 2008, 21 countries have already ratified the instrument. These include the countries where AJCU-Member schools operate, such as China, Australia, Republic of Korea, Philippines, and Indonesia.¹⁹ This commitment speaks highly of the value of commitment to internationalization and of strengthened cross-country collaboration.

¹⁷ Lee and Healy, 3.

¹⁸ Lee and Healy, 6.

¹⁹ List of Ratifying Countries. 14 December 2009, <http://erc.unesco.org/cp/convention.asp?KO=13523&language-E>

From the viewpoint of a Catholic and Jesuit university, this trend ascribed a primordial importance to skills and competencies, which are called upon by a knowledge-intensive economy, while downplaying the value of a humanistic formation. More than the skills and the vocational prowess of individuals, a more programmatic education with humanistic development as locus must be put into place or strengthened, if already in place. “Students are to be humanized in a world of massive manipulation, or technological sophistication, or increasing isolation and narrowness produced by progressive specializations, of globalization and developing responsibilities within an international community.”²⁰

b. Massification of higher education: Tension between quantity and quality

As a result of the increasing demand for higher education brought about by population growth and the increasing desire of the population for greater social and economic mobility, a consequent trend is the greater need to widen the reach of and increase accessibility to higher education.

“Massification of higher education reflects the global trend of improving higher education opportunities for all, and transforming higher education systems from being elitist to ensuring mass participation across different social, income and geographical groups.”²¹

This trend however, inevitably leads to the challenge of providing greater accessibility to education without sacrificing its quality. There must be a reasonable match between increased provision of education and ultimately increased quality of education. With the proliferation of highly diversified educational options, Jesuit universities need to confront the issue of maintaining the desired student population without resorting to an unreasonable degree of entrepreneurial activities.

As the number of education providers (government and private) increases, there is a corresponding decrease in the potential number of students that JEIs will have. How can the JEIs be insulated from this threat of dwindling enrolment? How can the Jesuit universities remain true to their nature and purpose while facing threats of declining student populations?

V. Blocks to expansive and sustainable regional collaboration

Fr. Superior General Adolfo Nicolas in his speech on the challenges and issues in Jesuit Education delivered in Ateneo de Manila University during the 150th

²⁰ Buckley, 115.

²¹ Lee and Healy, 3.

celebration of Jesuit Education in the Philippines, convincingly said that the “great challenges of the world cannot be responded to by one school or one university alone”. He calls upon the schools to work together and forge substantial academic and administrative alliances to gain greater strength and resources to respond to common problems.

This call has for a reasonable period of time been the collective goal of schools in the East Asia and Oceania. As early as 1994, after a series of meetings with the presidents of universities in Asia, the need to congregate has already been observed. It was in 2000 that a formal move to create an organization of University presidents in the various countries within East Asia and Oceania was made. Since then, the entity continues to grapple with various problems, struggles to maintain its balance, and engages in different initiatives to work better, respond better.

The following are the collaborative engagements made by the AJCU-EAO so far:

1. Bilateral cooperation between the following institutions:
 - a. Sanata Dharma and Ateneo de Manila University- on the organization of leadership and Ignatian spirituality workshops;
 - b. Xavier University and ATMI- on Agriculture and Vocational and Technical School;
 - c. Sogang University and Ateneo de Manila University- on Internationalization initiatives
2. Shared activities
 - a. Service Learning Program (SLP)- an ongoing project which started in 2007 conducted with the aim of gathering students from member-institutions and providing them an opportunity to experience learning in a multicultural environment yet united by the common bond of Jesuit education.
 - b. Initial efforts towards a conceptualization of an International Theology Program involving Schools of Theology in the region. This project aims to have mutual recognition of degrees among member-schools.
 - c. The constitution of research flagship committee consisting of the following members with their respective research agenda:
 - i. Sanata Dharma University on Interreligious Dialogue;
 - ii. Sophia University on Environment;
 - iii. Sogang University on Economics;
 - iv. Ateneo de Manila University on Migration;
 - v. ATMI Solo for Technology;
 - vi. Fr. Frank Brennan, S.J. on Social Justice/Human Rights

Notwithstanding the modest regional collaboration, there is still a wide space open for a more extensive and strategic collective action among the Jesuit institutions in the area. However, the actual engagement is potentially blocked by the disparity in the resources and strengths of the member-institutions.

Some Jesuit institutions still have a relatively weaker operational and financial status compared to others. As in the case of the Loyola School of Theology (Philippine Province), which grapples with financial difficulty as it spearheads the collaboration towards an International Theology Program. Some are already strong in research and instruction while others are still struggling with the research component. Some have already internationalized while others have barely started moving towards that direction.

The disparity in the capacity and potential among the Jesuit institutions needs to be addressed to pave the way for a more effective collective engagement. Such disparity can also be considered an opportunity for gradual capacity-building of the weaker institutions with the support of the stronger and more established ones. A specific example is the institutional and financial support that the Ateneo de Naga University and the Jesuit Australian province have begun to extend to the Loyola College of Cullion.²²

What some institutions are exploring and actually adopting, at least at the initial stage of the collaboration, is the engagement between individual institutions, such as between Ateneo de Manila and Sogang University²³. This way, the wide gap and the stark differences in some institutions do not get in the way.

Another area that the Jesuit schools can explore is an engagement with other educational institutions within the context of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)+3. ASEAN+3 is a community comprised of the eleven member-states of Southeast Asia plus China, Japan and Korea. Some of the identified goals of ASEAN+3 include economic integration, mutual comparability of degrees and professional qualifications. Common programs among academic institutions in the member-states can be pursued, such as joint researches on regional problems, faculty, staff and student exchange program, sharing of curriculum design to foster awareness of the diversity in the region. Through regional academic cooperation, cultural barriers can be gradually diffused which would lead to a more collaborative spirit in the region.

VI. Special problems unique to a country/Jesuit institution

a. Population decline

Fr. William Currie, S.J. in his address delivered in Boston College in 1999 said, "... economic and population factors are having an impact on Catholic higher education

²² Minutes of AJCU 2009 Annual Meeting, 2.

²³ Minutes of AJCU 2007 Annual Meeting, 13.

[in Japan], and the next few years are going to be difficult ones.”²⁴ Indeed in Japan, there is an observed decline in the population. The population segment belonging to the 18 years old bracket has declined from 2,050,000 in 1992 to an estimated 1,200,000 in the decade 2010-2020.

As aptly observed by Shinichi Yamamoto²⁵,

“It was the first time that universities had to confront a situation of declining enrollments and to face a shortage of students. The specter of high school students competing for university entrance was replaced by universities competing for students. Universities had to increase their attractiveness in order to market themselves to the students.”

Due to this population decline, Sophia University and Elizabeth University of Music are experiencing a corresponding slump in enrollment. The decline in turn, creates urgent and direct impact on the operation of the schools. The downtrend in student population pushed Elizabeth University to restructure its departments by cutting it down from four to two and thereby, reducing its faculty from 45 to 26.²⁶

In most countries in the region, there is still an observed growth in the population. However, despite the increasing population some universities continue to suffer dwindling enrollment because of the tight competition brought about by the massification of education.

Jesuit universities, then need to strategize how best to maintain their desired number of enrollees without necessarily becoming purely entrepreneurial in its approach and consequently, commodifying education.

b. Natural Catastrophes

Another concern that remains a priority for some Jesuit educational institutions in the region are the natural catastrophes which threaten lives and properties not only of the members of the institutions but of the community in general.

Just recently, the Filipinos experienced a major tragedy as typhoons *Ondoy* and *Pepeng* struck major parts of the country. “Over 1.3 million people were displaced.

²⁴ William Currie, S.J., “Challenges for Catholic Higher Education in Japan.” 3 December 2009, http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/News17/text10.html.

²⁵ Terance W. Bigalke and Deane E. Neubauer, ed. “Quality Assurance and Higher Education in Japan,” Higher Education in Asia/Pacific: Quality and the Public Good. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 113.

²⁶ Minutes of AJCU 2006 Annual Meeting, page 2, line no. 17.

Communities across Luzon and Metro Manila were left in ruins, and forever altered. The cost of the damage reached about 11 billion pesos for infrastructure, and 27 billion pesos for agriculture.”²⁷ The extent of damage and the consequent suffering among the victims called upon everyone, not only the government but also the private sector, to act and help in finding viable ways to prevent, or at least cushion the blows of similar catastrophe. The Jesuit institutions in the country immediately responded. But more than the cash and donations in kind, academic institutions, public or private, Jesuit or not, must engage in a more strategic approach of educating people on how best to sustainably care for the environment. Scientific and academic researches on environment, undertaken by various academic institutions, must be fully utilized by appropriate agencies to arrest highly imminent threats to ecological balance.

Indonesia and Japan, due to their location, are earthquake-prone countries. In May 2006, Yogyakarta, the city where Sanata Dharma University (SDU) is located, was hit by an earthquake, which killed around 5,000 people and destroyed many buildings. SDU was spared from the disaster since their infrastructures were designed to withstand disastrous effect of the tremors. Sophia University in Japan has a risk management system to prepare for natural disasters by training students and faculty. Recently, Sophia University has begun an extensive earthquake retrofit of all its campus facilities.

Given the forces of nature that are potentially disastrous, JEIs in the region need to prepare their respective communities to strategically secure life and property to mitigate the perilous effects of natural calamities. They must also educate their communities to refrain them from doing acts, which will further aggravate environmental degradation.

c. Changing environment for the academic profession

It was observed by Lee and Healy that in Southeast Asia, “[t]he development of the corporate culture into higher education institutions has required academics to behave like entrepreneurs and to market their expertise, services and research findings.”²⁸

²⁷ Manuel V. Pangilinan, “Keynote speech at the 8th Asian Forum on Corporate Social Responsibility” on November 20, 2009, Crown Plaza Hotel, Pasig City. Pangilinan enunciated that the private sector’s partnership with the government to undertake reconstruction is made possible through the newly constituted Philippine Disaster Recovery Foundation or PDRF. The PDRF is the “primary vehicle through which private individuals and corporations can contribute to rehabilitate and, ‘calamity-proof’ the country. The PDRF include representatives from different social development organizations, religious groups, businesses, and the education and scientific communities.”

²⁸ Lee and Healy, 10.

The various changes in the regional and global education environment also create a corresponding change in the way the academic profession is perceived or practiced. The growing demand for accountability and quality assurance among education providers create a corollary pressure on the part of the academics to perform better, be more innovative, research and publish more in the context of an already highly exacting job.

With these additional demands, academicians also expect equivalent salary increments. Jesuit universities need to allocate more funds for a more reasonable remuneration scheme. However, not all Jesuit universities are in a position to do so. This then also poses a challenge to the financially weaker universities on how best to impose greater responsibilities among the faculty without failing due to financial setbacks to provide appropriate additional compensation.

A concrete example is the case of Ateneo de Davao University (ADDU). ADDU struggles with labor issues as the activism of the employees' union brings to fore their demands. From time to time, the administration is confronted with demands for salary increase and working hour reduction (or regular teaching load). When unions' demands are unsatisfied, labor cases are then consequently filed before administrative and judicial forums. Series of strikes have also taken place, paralyzing office work and classes. These problems have negatively affected the relationships between the faculty and non-teaching staff and the administration, and between Union and non-Union employees. In several dialogues, parties have expressed their hurts during the height of labor disputes and strikes.

This kind of environment has necessitated that administration find creative ways of dialogue to address disagreements and settle conflicts. When opposed parties finally achieve settlement a strike, a "Healing Mass" is usually held.

Some parties, especially the administration and non-Union employees, describe union demands as motivated by materialism. In this context, formation programs are considered a necessary tool to orient or re-orient academic and non-academic employees in the educational goals of the school within the Jesuit mission, which cannot be reduced to compensation scales or pure entrepreneurship.

Hence, JEIs need to take seriously the formation of their faculty as well as their practical interests. As internationalization remains the trend, academicians in Catholic Jesuit universities have to explore and personally appropriate deeper levels of the Jesuit identity of the institution so that they can be instrumental in enhancing the Jesuit spirit in the institution. The faculty of any Jesuit institution, today greatly non-Jesuit, is crucial to the direction that Jesuit education will take.

d. Challenged Catholic and Jesuit Identity

All countries in the region, except the Philippines, are home to predominantly non-Catholic religions. This socio-cultural profile of the majority of countries presents as

much a pressing and urgent problem as a complex one. As the institutions remain Catholic and Jesuit in terms of formal identity, their component populations are not Catholic. Even in the Philippines, specifically in Ateneo de Zamboanga University, in 2007 15-19%²⁹ of its population were Muslims; currently this has grown to 20%³⁰ of the total population.

In the case of Sophia University, Catholic students are a minority. Most of the students are not Christians. There is a very weak Jesuit awareness on campus. In fact, in recognition of this crisis, the alumni even proposed that the Jesuits wear clerical shirts while on campus so that the community will know that Sophia is a Catholic university.³¹ In response to this, Sophia University is also undertaking a new professors' orientation on the Catholic mission and identity of the university.³² Professor E. Young Song of the Sogang University also shared an observation that only half of the faculty in their University is Catholic.³³ Fr. Andrew Kim, also commented that there was an attempt to emphasize Jesuit formation in the community, as initiated by President Sohn, but it was not able to achieve much. The extent of its implementation is limited to Jesuit formation integrated in the orientation of new faculty members.³⁴ On a more positive light, Sogang University is currently moving towards an "atmosphere of formation, spirituality and mission, and identity". It is doing serious work in line with the formation of the faculty as well as in the formulation of a curriculum based on Jesuit Mission and identity.³⁵

With the restructuring of Fu Jen University, its association with the Jesuit educational mission has faded. As Fr. Daniel Ross, S.J. puts it, "Fu Jen is never truly a Jesuit school, meaning that Jesuit influence is not dominant but essential part of the institution"³⁶.

If Jesuit presence is an indicator of the Jesuit identity of the schools, then, this identity is very weak. In most institutions, the number of Jesuits compared to the number of lay or other staff, faculty and administrators is very low.

²⁹ Minutes of AJCU 2007 Annual Meeting, page 6.

³⁰ Institutional Responses to Survey questions.

³¹ Minutes of AJCU-EAO 2006 Annual Meeting, page 3, line 26.

³² Minutes of AJCU-EAO 2001 Annual Meeting, page 11.

³³ Minutes of AJCU-EAO 2009 Annual Meeting, page 9.

³⁴ Ibid, page 11.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Minutes of AJCU-EAO 2006 Annual Meeting, page 5, line 34.

In Sogang University, Jesuits only comprise 2% of the total faculty and staff.³⁷ In Sanata Dharma, there are only 24 Jesuits fully employed and about 2 Jesuits help on the University as members of the Society.³⁸ Elizabeth School of Music also articulated that the number of Jesuits in the institution is not enough. **[table]**

In all Jesuit institutions in the region, the population of Jesuits is decreasing. This has direct impact on the ability of the institution to sustain the Jesuit character. In recognition of this problem, there must be stronger, more strategic efforts to bolster Jesuit-lay collaboration. As generously shared by EUM in their efforts to strengthen Jesuit-lay collaboration,

“We consciously seek “full-partnership”— leadership that shares responsibility and authority. Though the chancellor (chair of the board of directors of the school corporation) is a Jesuit, two presidents (chief academic officers) during the past 15 years have been non-Jesuit and non-Christian. In our present context, full partnership cannot be thought of as an expedient necessary to compensate for decreased Jesuit presence. In the light of the message of Decree 6 of the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (“Collaboration at the Heart of Mission”), we consider full partnership to be essential to our mission and identity.”³⁹

Within this context, the palpable challenge is to have a solid grasp of the character, identity and purpose of a Catholic, Jesuit educational institution. The individual and collective efforts of Jesuits institutions will lose meaning and direction if the question of identity is relegated to the background. These institutions must constantly and continually revisit their identity and refocus their academic and even non-academic endeavors to the strengthening (or renewal) of such identity.

As aptly and eloquently explained by Fr. Michael Buckley, S.J., the Catholic university can maintain its identity in the midst of a highly multicultural world by becoming all-embracing:

“The university’s reach must be toward all things, towards anything that bespeaks human experience and serious discourse—so that members of traditions other than Catholic should find themselves more at home here than elsewhere, experiencing that the high human and religious values, the human achievements and concerns, to which they have given their own lives, are treasured, affirmed, and fostered

³⁷ Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education in East Asia/Oceania, 26-27 May 2006. Page 4.

³⁸ Sanata Dharma University’s Reply to AJCU-EAO Questionnaire, 3.

³⁹ EUM’s Reply to the AJCU-EAO Questionnaire.

here with an intensity and concern that comes out of the Catholic character of the university. Here, in its purpose, lies its meaning and urgency.”⁴⁰

Can Catholic Jesuit academic institutions remain Catholic and Jesuit given the cultural reality that only a handful of the population are Catholics, that most of the people do not share the religious beliefs of Catholics and that very few Jesuits are actually present in the institutions? In this light, an examination of what must sustain the Catholic and Jesuit character of the university is imperative.

Conclusion

Collectively, the region may have its own share of achievements but these achievements can be described as but small victories compared with the great expectations encapsulated in the Jesuit mission. That is, the member schools of AJCU-EAO have much to do before they reach the finish line. Some of them may have yet to find fresh approaches to dialogue with governments and operate with less restriction; while others will have to take advantage of the freedom they enjoy to sharpen more their impact on religious and spiritual formation of their communities. Some may have to utilize collaboration in common advocacies to sharpen impact on society. Some may have to benchmark to improve academic programs, while others will have to evaluate if the programs they offer respond to the needs and issues in their respective environments. Some may have to create structures and mechanisms to engage in social involvement and impact on development, while those who have institutionalized outreach may have to evaluate their engagement’s impact. All are challenged yet to revisit their mission-vision and check if they resonate that of the Society. All are challenged to do communal discernment how Catholic and Jesuit their universities are.

The diversity in the region can both be a threat and an opportunity. It is a potential threat if the schools fail to transcend parochial, narrow and exclusive concerns. On the other hand, it is an opportunity for a rich multicultural engagement, an opportunity to live out the fundamental purpose of a Catholic university, which is the nurturing of universal values of integration and due regard to differences.

Crucial to the continued existence of Jesuit universities is finding a way to continue maintaining and developing education grounded on Catholicism and Jesuit spirit, notwithstanding the status of Catholicism as a minority religion in most of the countries in the region. This challenge is also true in the context of a world that is now becoming largely governed by pragmatism and secular disposition.

⁴⁰ Buckley, 21.

Ignatian education must create awareness among the people that education is more than an economic tool that can allow them greater convenience, and movement in the social and economic strata. Ignatian education must promote and provide education whose goal is the “cultivation of the intellect”⁴¹.

Jesuit education must be mindful of the fact that “[t]hose without an educated ability to discern among incentives and arguments are easily manipulated, as their appetites are dominated by media hype, sophistic politics, and regressive appeals to sensationalism, money, race, power, and individualistic self-interest.”⁴² Jesuit education must strive to develop in every individual a discerning and reflective character, which are essential in a world that is gradually consumed by materialism and other secular values.

Further, all Jesuit institutions not only in the region but also in other parts of the world must continue to undertake researches and measures to find plausible solutions to the varied socio-cultural, economic, and political problems in their respective communities.

Finally, the challenge for Jesuit universities is how to strike a balance between, on one hand, the highly intensified demand for more competition-driven reforms in today’s global economy to improve the economic productivity of working force, and, on the other, the universal desire to bring about the integral formation of individual persons rooted in humanistic development.

⁴¹ Michael Buckley, S.J., The Catholic University as Promise and Project: Reflections in a Jesuit Idiom. (Washington DC., Georgetown University Press, 1998) xv.

⁴² Buckley, xix.