Governance of Open Universities — A Few Observations on Trends in Asia

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Abstract: Like all organisations, good governance is a fundamental requirement for the responsible and accountable management of universities in general and open universities in particular. This is to ensure that these (open) universities remain relevant to their mission of facilitating unfettered access to higher education for citizens and at the same time continue being reliable contributors to personal and institutional developments, the vital ingredients to maintaining sustained national development. While several studies have, in the past, been conducted on governance of universities, almost all of them have centred around conventional, face-to-face institutions. Not much published literature is in evidence on the governance of Open Universities. This paper, drawing from a study on the governance of a few open universities in Asia, tries to discuss the nature of their challenges, and the lessons that can be drawn from their practices and experience. The study focused on aspects relating to institutional autonomies such as curriculum, budgeting and financial management, admission standards, conferment of qualifications, academic staff appointments, development and promotions and research policies. Our findings indicate that, similar to conventional systems, the state plays a crucial role in many aspects of governance both in publicly funded and privately supported institutions. Recent attempts at governance transformation towards greater institutional autonomies is beginning to show limited changes in some but not all jurisdictions studied.

Keywords: Open universities; Governance; Asia

Introduction

Among the drivers of sustainable development, many would consider the role of higher education as critical to success. Recognising this, and as a judicious response, investments in higher education in Asia have witnessed a dramatic growth resulting in increased participation of the appropriate age cohort over the last thirty years (Table 1). The last thirty years has also witnessed improvement in the socio-economic conditions and well-being of Asians, especially in heavily populated countries like China and India, supporting the findings of international institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank that "no nation that has not expanded reasonably well its higher education system could achieve [a] high level of economic development" (Tilak, 2003).

Many governments see universities, besides being centres of scholarship, research and innovation, also as production centres of much needed human talent to populate the nation's governmental, industrial, business and academic institutions, leading to yielding positive economic returns. This is especially so with expanding graduate education, which is seen as a means of increasing the economic

competitiveness of the country and a sustainable supportive tool for national development. Growth, however, has not been uniform across the continent. Gross enrolment ratios in higher education varies from under 10% of the relevant segment (Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka) to over 50% (South Korea). To a large extent the financing of higher education, besides the paucity of academic talent, has been among the major deterrents preventing uniform growth across the continent. To overcome especially the former, governments have adopted a number of strategies to increase access and participation. These have included expanding the existing public university systems (Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, India), inviting private participation in higher education (Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, Pakistan) and applying innovative pedagogical techniques like open learning (India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, among others) and using technologies such as distance education. There are well over 20,000 face-to-face universities in Asia, catering to between 100-110 million students. The vast majority of these institutions and students are in India and China. In addition, Asia is also home to approximately 42 open universities, which host a total of 11 million, mostly adult, part-time learners (Table 2).

Table 1: Total Enrolment ['000] in Higher Education and Gross Enrollment Ratio (after ADB, 2012)

COUNTRY	1990		2000		2007	
	ENR	GER	ENR	GER	ENR	GER
Cambodia	5.5	1	22	2	131	5
China [PRC]	3,925	3	7,364	8	25, 346	22
India	4,780	6	9,404	10	12, 853	12
Indonesia	1,516	8	3,018	14	3,755	21
RO Korea	1,630	37	3003	78	3,209	96
P R Lao	4.7	1	14	3	...	12
Malaysia	121	7	549	26	1,299	32
Philippines	6,181	25	7,975	30	...	28
Sri Lanka	75	4	...	...	390α	21
Thailand	952	7.2	1,900	35	2,470	45
Vietnam	186	3	732	9	1,590	...

... = no data available, ENR= enrollment, GER = gross enrollment ratio, Lao PDR = Lao People's Democratic Republic, PRC = People's Republic of China. α-World Bank (2008) quoting multiple sources.
Source: *UNESCO* (2009: pp. 231–236).

One of the major influences leading to the establishment of the first open university, the UKOU, was to widen participation in higher education as a means of social and economic advancement in an emerging technological age. Their over-riding purpose, expressed through their mission statement, is to provide greater educational opportunity for all, for purposes of personal and national development (Tait, 2008). Successive generations of open universities have consistently availed themselves of available communication and information technologies to operationalise that principle and have evolved "their organisations (to support): course creation, production and distribution, student services, management of tutors and counsellors, and quality control" alongside the more traditional university function of organising research and teaching (Peters, 2008).

Table 2: List of Open Universities in Asia. (After ADB, 2011)

SIZE	LOCATION	INSTITUTION	ENROLLMENT
Big Mega OUs Above 500,000 students	China	Open University China [N]	2,663,500
	India	**Indra Gandhi National OU [N]**	2,468,208
	Pakistan	Allam Iqbal Open U[N]	1,565,783
	Indonesia	Universitas Terbuka Indonesia [N]	646,647
Big OUs 100,000 – 499,000 students	China	Jiangsu Open University	157,088
		Guangdong Open University	158,271
		Zhejiang Open University	139,974
		Beijing Open University	110,084
		Sichuan Open University	102,917
		Hunan Open University	100,421
		Anhui Open University	100,277
	S. Korea	KNOU	182,000
	India	YCMOU	342,862
		BRAOU	176,048
	Thailand	STOU	~400,000
		Ramkhamkeng U	~400,000
	Bangladesh	Bangladesh Open University [N]	271,630
Medium OUs 50,000 to 99,000 students	China	Henan Open University	96,144
		Shaanxi Open University	96,267
		Hebei Open University	95,130
		Shandong Open University	93,317
		Experimental Schools of the Open University of China	85,724
		Hubei Open University	79,477
		Fujian Open University	71,088
		Shanxi Open University	70,256
		Guangxi Open University	67,880
		Chongqing Open University	66,840
		Guizhou Open University	64,146
		Guangzhou Open University	62,247
		Jiangxi Open University	60,484
		Tianjin Open University	58,761
		Gansu Open University	57,794
		Liaoning Open University	52,052
	India	VMOU	94102
		NOU	60174
		MPBOU	88613
		BAOU	74839
		KSOU	55961
		NSOU	90350
		UPRTOU	76293
	Vietnam	HCM City OU	65,000
		Hanoi OU	67,000
SMALL OUs - BELOW 50,000 STUDENTS	Malaysia	Wawasan OU	4,000
	China (Hong Kong)	Hong Kong OU	17,813
	India	PSSOU	9029
		UOU	1,439
	Philippines	UPOU	2,834
	Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka OU	27,000

The vast majority of Asian Open Universities, following the successful establishment of the UKOU have been established by national or regional governments to provide an alternative route into tertiary education; in some countries, such as Malaysia and India, private or charitable enterprises have also begun to play an active role in establishing distance teaching institutions. For a number of reasons, including demand from education consumers, governments began to take a serious interest in the structure, governance, management and quality of Open Universities, especially fearing the creation of huge 'degree mills' if they were left unsupervised. Invariably, just as in conventional systems, governments gave themselves wide ranging powers to exercise oversight of the governance and management of these universities through legislative instruments. Such powers often challenge the practices of open institutions, since their educational delivery systems and planning — to support big, widely dispersed student populations over large geographical regions — require industrial production and service approaches. This often runs counter to generally accepted notions of good teaching and learning environments as found in campus-based institutions.

Open Universities have, over the years, developed managerial approaches in response to the challenges faced by them in a given country's context. The regulatory and technological environment as well as a desire to deliver educational outcomes comparable to their conventional counterparts meant combining seamlessly academic and industrial cultures. Open Universities that represent academic systems catering to large populations of mature learners, widely dispersed and highly diversified, present a different governance arrangement compared to conventional universities. Studies on good governance of these institutions, which determines how effectively they are managed contribute to the developmental goals, fundamental to their creation, in the first place and could provide valuable insights on the functioning of all academic institutions, in support of sustainable development of their communities. While a large number of studies on governance of universities have been conducted in the last decade, little evidence of such studies exists for Open Universities. This paper, based on a study conducted by the authors on the governance trends in Open Universities in Asia reflects upon the implications of these trends on management of Open Universities in the Asian context.

There are different descriptors of 'governance' found in the literature but for the purpose of this study a very broad description used by the World Bank in 2008 is being adopted, namely, "The term 'governance' is used to describe all those structures, processes and activities that are involved in the planning and direction of the institutions and people working in tertiary education". Another useful reference to the term university governance is one that is shared by the Committee of University Chairs (2014):

> Governance means effective stewardship of the university to secure its future, safeguarding the university's mission and the public services it provides, securing the proper and effective use of public funds and accounting to stakeholders and society for institutional performance.

Over the last three decades a number of studies on university governance have been undertaken by scholars such as Becher and Kogan (1992); Bleiklie (1998; 2005); Clark (1998); Dill and Sporn (1995); Etzkowitz and Leydesdorf, (1997); Keller, (1980), Neave, (1998), Neave and Van Vught, (1991; 1994), Olsen (2005); Slaughter and Leslie (1997), and Teichler (1988). These studies, mostly conducted on

conventional universities, largely comment on two sets of ideas which Bleiklie and Kogan (2007) refer to as, universities either being a "republic of scholars" or as "stakeholder organizations". The interests of other stakeholders circumscribe academic freedom, and decision-making takes place within more hierarchical structures designed to provide leaders the authority to make and enforce strategic decisions within the organization.

The last decade has also witnessed a strong move away from the republic model to the stakeholder one. Recent studies on governance, such as Asiimwe (2013), citing Baldwin (2009), emphasise the primacy of governance in fostering academic freedom, good governance and the distinction between the democratic university and the managerial university Academics working in the area of governance research also feel that the last two decades have seen the successive managerialisation of the university governance. There is also considerable evidence to suggest that university governance has shifted from "the professoriate" to managers – who are, in turn, subject to the external market and state regulations (Terry, 2008).

Recent studies in Southeast Asia, by the Asian Development Bank (2012), also tend to show similar trends, especially among public funded universities. This study, by the bank, clustered levels of autonomy, in selected countries, in key aspects of governance into three groups (Table 3). It noted considerable variation in the governance systems across the region, identifying three trends in governance and administration. These include a move to "consolidate national oversight of higher education; increasing decentralisation of responsibility and authority from central to institutional level administrators; and increased autonomy of campus level administrators in the management of institutions" (ADB, 2011). The last of the three was especially considered to be the most "pressing and controversial" issue. The levels of autonomy enjoyed by the institutions is not uniform across all jurisdictions. It varies considerably, with mature systems (such as Singapore) having considerable freedom on matters of freedom, quality assurance and personnel management, while others (such as Cambodia) still continue with traditional practices where Ministries of Education exert enormous influence on matters of finance, personnel management and even curriculum. The ADB study did not cover the governance and management of the region's open universities.

The study presented in this paper was conducted in 2016 and included six Open Universities/institutions in Asia. This study was designed as an exploratory study, aimed at collecting information from select Asian Open Universities, using a stratified, purposive sample to ensure representation from mega- and medium-sized Open Universities, from South Asia and Southeast Asia, as well as a representation from publicly funded and privately sponsored universities so as to enable a study of variation across different types of entities. The institutions that were studied were:

i.   Uniiversitas Terbuka: Indonesia
ii.   Indira Gandhi National Open University
iii.   Symbiosis Centre for Distance Learning (Private)
iv.   Sukhothai Thamathirat Open University
v.   Korea Open University
vi.   Wawasan Open University (Private)

Table 3: Levels of Institutional Autonomy in Key Aspects of Governance (ADB, 2011)

Institutional Autonomy Dimension	Cluster 1		Cluster 2			Cluster 3			
	Indonesia (Public)	Malaysia	Indonesia (SOLE HEIs)	Philippines	Thailand	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Mongolia	Viet Nam
Set Academic Structure and Course Content	**	**	***	***	***	***	**	**	**
Decision on Student Numbers	***	*	***	***	***	***	**	n/a	*
Set Salaries	*	*	**	**	***	**	n/a	n/a	*
Set Tuition Fees	*	*	***	***	***	**	**	***	*
Reliance on Government Funding	*	*	***	**	***	**	**	*	*
Staff Employment and Dismissal	*	**	*	*	**	**	**	n/a	**
Principal-Agent Problem	*	***	***	***	***	***	***	n/a	***
Career Paths of University Administrators	**	**	**	***	***	***	***	n/a	***

* = limited autonomy, ** = semi autonomy, *** = full autonomy, HEI = higher education institution, Lao PDR = Lao People's Democratic Republic, n/a = not applicable, SOLE = state-owned legal entity. Source: *Dhirathiti* (2011).

How an institution is governed is generally reflected in the arrangements made through its charter or act, the degree of empowerment that various levels of governance enjoy, the transparency and openness of behaviour, the layers of governance and the separation of their powers, the channels of communication, etc. Some criteria that have been frequently applied as indicators of governance, and which this study also used as a guide, include:

- Respecting autonomy as the best guarantee of quality and international reputation.
- Value accorded to academic freedom and high-quality research, scholarship and teaching.
- Protection of the collective student interest.
- The publication of accurate and transparent information that is publicly accessible.
- A recognition that accountability for funding derived directly from stakeholders requires HEIs to be clear that they are in a contract with stakeholders who pay for their service and expect clarity about what is received.
- The promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity throughout the institution.
- Openness on key aspects of practice such as admissions [access], curriculum, assessment, progressions and promotions, appointments, etc.
- Full and transparent accountability for public funding.

Besides these descriptors, the study also looked at some aspects of the external influences on governance of institutions, especially the role of governments and private owners of some Open Universities and the extent of their involvement.

In the quest to fill the gap in our knowledge in the governance of Open Universities , we explored a number of aspects, including instruments, patterns and practices which are currently in place in these universities, the alignment of governance arrangements to the fundamental ideology of openness, practices and arrangements to resolve conflicting interests between academic autonomies and stakeholder interests, and problems that detract from productive engagement amongst competing stakeholder interests. The study collected information through a detailed survey instrument which served as the guide to conduct focus group discussions and in-depth, face-to-face interviews with various stakeholders including the members of the Governing Board/Council, the President/CEO, the Vice Presidents/Deputy Vice Chancellors, members of the governance bodies like Senate, Academic Councils; School Boards/Faculty Boards and representatives of faculty or student associations wherever applicable. In this paper we present our reflections on select findings in Tables 4, 5 and 6 as well as in Appendix 1 in this paper on the following aspects:

- Overall Governance arrangements and structures
- Role and decision spheres of academic faculty, academic autonomy
- Selection appointment and promotion of faculty
- Financial autonomy
- Patterns of communication and information sharing
- Executive power and accountability.

Overall Governance Arrangements and Structures

All of the institutions studied, including the two 'private' ones, have in place a formal governance structure as reflected by their respective Acts, Statutes or Constitutions. By and large respective governments have tended to use acts and statuettes that are identical or almost similar to those used by their conventional university systems, with appropriate provisions in the Acts to recognize the special needs of open systems. The regulatory bodies responsible for Open Universities, are mostly agencies of the Ministries of Education or Higher Education. Open Universities/institutions in the study were found to be often subjected by the regulatory agencies to special treatment, recognizing on the one hand the need to handle them differently but on the other hand expecting them to behave as per the norms designed for conventional universities.

While significant autonomy has been provided to the institutions through their Acts, there were fairly common instances of the government using its regulatory power to exercise limits on the choices that the universities can make. In India, for example, under the ODL guidelines issued by the University Grants Commission, technical programmes at degree levels like engineering can no longer be offered by the country's Open Universities, even though the Act empowers these universities to offer programmes approved through its statutory bodies. Likewise, *Act 44* in Thailand permits that government to limit the powers of institutions in times of civil strife or other national emergencies. The powers of autonomy in such instances does not seem to be   a sufficient condition in the operationalisation and exercise of autonomy in practice.

Fairly similar bi- or tri-cameral governance structures were found to exist in all universities studied, with the Board of Governors /Board of Management / Governing Council functioning as the highest statutory body with policy oversight and the Senate/Academic Council at the second level with overall responsibility on all matters academic. The private institutions studied had an additional layer in the form of Board of Directors/trustees, responsible for ensuring ownership interests. The Governing Councils/Board of Management were found to have wide ranging powers as per the respective Acts, design and frame policies on organizational structures, finance, staff management, infrastructure management and capital investments. Indonesia presented a different arrangement in that there is no governing council and the Senate is the highest decision-making body. The government in this case was found to have a heavier influence on non-academic matters. The third level in the governance structure was comprised of the faculty or the school boards with powers relating to decisions on academic programmes, curriculum design and delivery as well as assessment structures. The decisions of the Faculty Boards, however, need senate approvals in most cases.

Membership of the governing bodies were as per the provisions made in the respective Acts. The governing Council, in the cases of India, Indonesia and Malaysia, had external members representing academic experts, industry or professional bodies. The private universities also include representatives of their Board of Directors /Board of Trustees sitting in Councils. In India and Indonesia, the membership also included representatives from the federal government. In at least 50% of the cases studied the Vice Chancellors chaired the governing council to which he/she was expected to be accountable.

The membership of the Senate, following statutory provisions had both *ex officio* and nominated members. The deans, all professors in some open universities, registrars and heads of units, like the library, bursary and Education Technology, represented the *ex officio* members. The nominated members could represent academics or other cadres like media or IT. The President or VC acts as Chair of the Senate in all universities studied. In the case of Faculty / School Boards, the membership was almost automatic in that all faculty in a given school had membership on the boards, and these boards were chaired by the dean, which was a rotational position in some public universities (India, Indonesia) and by appointment in others (Malaysia). The membership of the governing bodies is not found to be differentiated as voting or non-voting members; all members had a voting right.

Our findings on other aspects of governance structures and arrangements in the institutions studied were:

- Open Universities in the region present very different institutional management situations on account of their widely dispersed and distributed and very large learner populations, and the infrastructure, both human and technological, that is required to be created for maintaining responsive learner support. The regulatory Acts and charters, while being developed, were so closely based on the existing frameworks for conventional universities that the opportunity to provide for a different nature of academic responsibility and academic delivery, using tutors and technology, learner support models, continuous assessment and provisions for learner flexibility, was not taken advantage of. Again, the Acts and charters have not evolved to incorporate the new realities of technology supporting learning, blended learning approaches, OER and MOOC-based learning. Opportunities for providing for the participation of regional and learning center heads in governance structures also seem to have been missed.

- The Acts also provide overriding powers to the Vice Chancellors, which could create a centralization of power situation detrimental to good governance. The personality and leadership style of the chief executive could, in such a situation, very strongly influence governance descriptors like transparency, accountability, academic autonomy of faculty and open discussion.
- While significant autonomies have been provided through their Acts and Statutes to the Open Universities, governments/boards of trustees have tended to exercise influence over decision making, often in the name of public or stakeholder interest or parity with other higher education systems. A number of respondents, especially in the focus group sessions, indicated that the powers and authority of the universities over time has been eroding simply because of leadership at the institutional level and/or increasing interference from Ministries of Education (public universities) or Board of Directors (private institutions). The role of leadership is again a critical determinant of the way academic autonomy is defended.

Role and Decision Spheres of Academic Faculty, Academic Autonomy

The role and areas of influencing decisions by the faculty as well as the levels of academic autonomy were assessed by surveying the faculty members' own perception about their academic autonomy and role in various issues (Table 4). The major areas of conflict seem to arise out of the semi-industrial nature of operations and the deadline driven delivery metrics required to achieve for reasonably good quality learner support and timely delivery of academic resources and services. The system efficiency and financial effectiveness requirements at times put operational managers in a more influential role than academics, especially for operational issues. Faculty members agreed that they had significant latitude in matters related to curriculum matters, other than those regulated for purposes either of quality and programme standards (Malaysia through the Malaysian Qualification Agency) or in ensuring a respect for national ideology and efforts at nation building (Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia).

Faculty autonomy was found to be high in all decisions regarding undergraduate and graduate education policy, choice of programmes and courses to offer, course design and development processes, course delivery and learner support, choice of pedagogy and the geographic regions where a programme would be offered, standards for the evaluation of programme quality, personal development of faculty and their professional enhancements (promotions). Their influence, as per their own perception, was seen as being low in decisions on deadlines for course presentations and those for assessments and results, tenure-track policies, post-tenure review, faculty related personnel policies, standards for evaluating teaching or evaluating the President's performance, selection of the President or Vice President, choice of collaborating partners, policies regarding intellectual property and investment choices. Except in the cases of Korea and Thailand they were found to have a modest influence on institutional choice of technology and investment decisions.

Table 4: Faculty Perception of Their *Role* in Decision Making

Perceptions of Faculty Role	INDIA		MALAYSIA	INDONESIA	THAILAND	S. KOREA
	PUBLIC	PRIVATE				
Appointments of full-time faculty	**	*	**	**	**	***
Tenure promotions for faculty	*	*	*	***	***	***
Decisions about the content of the curriculum	***	***	***	***	***	***
Setting degree requirements	***	*	*	***	***	***
Types of degrees offered	**	*	***	***	***	***
Relative sizes of the Faculty of various Disciplines	**	**	**	***	***	**
Construction programs for buildings and other facilities	*	*	*	**	***	**
Setting of the average teaching loads	**	**	*	***	***	***
Appointing the academic Dean	***	*	*	***	***	*
Appointing department chairs or heads	**	*	*	***	***	***
Setting faculty salary Scales	*	*	*	*	*	*
Decisions about individual faculty salaries (refer to dept. chairs in glossary)		*	*	*	*	*
Short range budgetary planning	**	**	**	**	**	**
Decisions that establish the authority of faculty in campus governance	**	*	**	**	**	***
Selecting members for Institution-wide Committees, senate and similar agencies	**	*	**	***	***	***

* No role; ** Some modest role; *** Active role

While institutional administrations seemed to value and welcome open debate and discussion, faculty participation, even in their own forums such as the Senate, Faculty and Departmental Boards and on standing and *ad hoc* committees was found to be, at best, modest. At higher level forums, even departmental heads and deans were not enthusiastic contributors to dialogues and decision making. This may be attributed to the strong sense of hierarchy reflected in the deference exhibited in the presence of the senior Academics present, or to the Chair or prevailing national /institutional culture (Thailand, Malaysia). The incidence of open debate at Faculty Boards was found to be at a much higher level than that at the level of Senate or Governing Council.

The incidence of academic apathy towards an active participation in good governance seems to be a trend largely due to workloads and the deadline driven nature of work at the Open Universities, besides the hierarchical nature of institutional cultures amongst many Asian cultures. The 'cog in the wheel in a large system' kind of syndrome also seems to prevail, especially among younger faculty. The involvement or lack of it needs to be addressed to identify ways of ensuring that it doesn't escalate, as this could become a serious concern at the time of initiating institutional changes or developing policies.

Table 5: Faculty Perception of Autonomy

Perceptions of Faculty Role	INDIA PUBLIC	MALAYSIA PRIVATE	INDONESIA	THAILAND	S. KOREA	Perceptions of Faculty Role
Undergraduate educational policy (e.g. admission standards	***	***	***	**	***	***
Graduate education policy	***	***	***	**	***	***
Undergraduate curriculum (e.g., general education	***	**	**	**	***	***
Deadlines for course presentation	***	*	*	**	***	*
Deadlines for course assessment and results	*	*	*	**	***	*
Instructional design	**	**	**	**	***	***
Choices of technology for delivery	**	*	**	**	**	***
Regions where the programme would be offered	***	*	*	**	**	*
Choice of collaborating partners/overseas alliances	*	*	*	**	**	***
General standards and issues concerning promotion and tenure (e.g., tenure clock policies	*	*	**	*	**	**
Standards for post-tenure review	*	*	*	*	**	**
Standards for evaluating teaching	*	*	**	**	**	**
Evaluation of the performance of the President	*	*	*	*	**	*
Evaluation of the performance of the Academic Vice President	*	n/a	*	*	*	*
Evaluation of the quality of academic programs	***	**	***	***	***	***
Selection of the President	*	*	*	**	***	***
Selection of the Academic Vice President	*	n/a	*	**	*	*
Institutional choice of mode of learning	**	**	***	**	***	***
Institutional use/choice of Technology	**	*	**	**	***	***
Policies pertaining to intellectual property	*	*	**	*	*	*
Faculty-related personnel policies (e.g., merit pay, health care, retirement benefits, grievance policies	*	*	*	*	*	**
Policies related to Learner support	***	***	***	**	***	**
Policies related to LLL for faculty	***	*	***	**	***	***
Faculty mobility	***	n/a	***	**	**	**
Investment priorities and choices	*	n/a	*	*	*	**
Allocation of budgets	**	*	***	*	*	**

* ** Strong; ** Modest; * Weak

Appointment, Promotion and Remuneration of Academic Staff

While there are differences among the countries, in their recruitment and appointment policies, the more significant differences were actually seen between the public and private institutions. The private institutions, with their less formalized procedures and greater degrees of freedom in recruitment, seemed to have a shorter process for appointments while the public institutions had greater rigour in the appointment of their staff, with almost all four public institutions having their conditions of service similar to, and in some aspects, identical to the civil services /conventional public universities. Except in the case of India's public Open University, no staff unions are permitted and, generally, remuneration schemes are rarely negotiated at the institutional levels. In other words, 'collective bargaining' is not part and parcel of the institutional cultures studied.

In the case of two of the public institutions studied (Thailand, Indonesia), faculty upon appointment are considered to be civil servants and governed by the service conditions of the civil service. In all the other cases, they were considered employees of the university as an autonomous body.

In all the Open Universities studied, faculty remuneration and benefits were as per the regulations for civil servants (Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea) or norms governing all universities (UGC in India). Private institutions in the sample were found to exercise discretion over the salaries determined for individual faculty members within the pay band approved by the staffing policy at the university. In these institutions while there was transparency regarding the different pay bands and faculty benefits, the actual salary determined for each faculty member was not expected to be publicly shared. Discretionary powers of the CEO/top management to allocate remuneration/benefits were found to exist in some cases (Indonesia, Malaysia, private institution in India). Salaries at the lower level were also found to be a factor in faculty turnover in private institutions in the highly competitive markets in Malaysia and India.

Likewise, promotion of faculty, was required to follow prescribed regulations in terms of eligibility and due process in the case of public universities, while the private institutions studied had more latitude in framing their institutional policies on promotion and rewarding performance.

Role of Students

The direct participation of students in decision making or governance bodies was not found to exist in any of the Open Universities studied except in the case of Korea, where student representation on the fee committee ensures their voice in decisions on tuition fees. The student unions were not found to exist in any of the institutions studied, which could be on account of the distributed learner populations who may not meet frequently enough to make union activity practical. Indirect influence through institutionalized feedback from learners is a fairly well entrenched practice in most of the institutions in this study. Open Universities may have to reassess, given the maturity of their learners, if learner participation in their governance systems would add significant value, since there may be a strong case for such inclusion given the philosophies of openness of Open Universities.

Table 6: Student Engagement in Decision Making

Elements of Influence	INDIA		MALAYSIA	INDONESIA	THAILAND	S. KOREA
	PUBLIC	PRIVATE				
Inputs from the student councils	X	X	X	*X*	*X*	X*
Student representation on university senate / councils	X	X	X	X	X	X
Feedback collated year wise by schools	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y**
Invited comments	Y	Y	Y	X	Occasionally	X
Student demands through union activity	X	X	X	X	X	X

X= No; Y= YES; * only on matters concerning fees; ** Course evaluation

Financial Autonomy

The freedoms to fully control and allocate its budget internally are important aspects of university autonomy. None of the universities in the region studied were found to enjoy this privilege to its full extent.

All the public Open Universities studied receive their grants as 'block' grants or plan-wise budget grants, through negotiations with their respective Ministry of Education. In the study, both the private institutions were found to have a strict budget control exercised by the owners; the public universities, upon receiving their grants, were found to have a greater degree of freedom to internally allocate and distribute the funds in accordance with the approved budget heads.

All the institutions studied levied tuition fees. The private institutions exercised discretion in setting up fees to manage revenue targets but were obliged to keep fee levels within the limits prescribed by the regulatory agencies. The public universities in the study enjoyed funding support and fee levels were designed to enable access to large sections of the population, in some cases (e.g., India), these were kept at very low levels for non-laboratory programmes.

Almost all public Open Universities are permitted to retain their surplus tuition fees, over which they have a great degree of autonomy of use. The external investment of surpluses was, however, found to be highly regulated.

In most Asian countries — though public university constitutions permit them to own land, buildings and other assets—rarely have total freedom to buy additional assets or sell owned assets without government oversight or control. Private institutions are always subject to the control of their boards to either add to or dispose of their assets without the consent of their boards. The four public Open Universities in this study own their properties in their own name but their right to dispose them is highly regulated.

Patterns of Communication and Sharing

The universities in the study were found to utilize a variety of mechanisms and processes for sharing information and important governance communication ranging from intranets and shared drives to sharable archives for minutes and papers of governance bodies. Such information, however, was not available in the public domain.

Despite a wealth of channels for effective communication, conversations with focal groups (Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia) gave the impression that these channels mostly serve for administration to transmit information one way, and mechanisms to receive feedback and engage faculty in open discussions on issues that matter to them is often poorly developed or not there at all. This may be a reflection of cultural norms, work pressures or a generic apathy on the part of faculty to respond back on all matters of institutional governance, especially those that may not directly concern their own interests.

Timely flow of complete information to the highest bodies like the Board of Governors was sometimes an issue. Likewise, flow of information on decisions taken by governance bodies to the regional centers and learning centers sometimes was found to be an irritant in very large public systems.

Checks on Executive Power and Public Accountability

The tri- or bicameral nature of governance in all the universities studied, with their committee structures and reporting protocols do provide an effective check on any unfettered exercise of power by senior executives of the institutions. The incidence of decisions by Chair action and its *post facto* ratification by the Senate/academic council was found to exist in almost all institutions, followed as a practice in the interest if expediency. Some universities addressed this issue through the creation of standing committees of the academic council or the research council.

For institutional decisions, especially those with financial implications, a strong element of internal audit (Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia) coupled with a statutory annual external audit (Malaysia, India) is in place to exercise checks on executive power.

In institutions where faculty unions exist (only in India), issues impacting academic freedom or accountabilities are often challenged through collective bargaining. The union action may have at times successfully prevented institutional initiatives like annual performance appraisal of faculty from being implemented except as a prerequisite at the time of promotion.

Concluding Remarks

Like their counterparts, Open Universities, whether publicly or privately funded, require a supportive legislative environment in which the institutions have sufficient autonomies to achieve both the institutional objectives as well as a national developmental agenda. A series of recent studies in Asia (Raza, 2009) seems to suggest that a number of countries, especially those in the upper-middle and higher-income categories have been adjusting their system-wide governance arrangements to devolve the management and oversight of their universities, to a certain extent, and also as a response to greater participation of the private sector in higher education. Fielden (2008) drew attention to systems that are shifting from being state *controlled* to state *supervised.*

This study, the first one on governance trends in Open Universities in the Asian context, was an exploratory one aimed at understanding the patterns and processes of governance followed. Invariably, governance arrangements of institutions reflect the societies in which they are situated. Further, they also reflect their ownership. Publicly owned institutions tend to be more transparent (especially on financial matters) than privately owned ones. In highly developed and liberal

democratic societies governments are more willing to share governance arrangements than less liberal societies. Almost all of the six institutions in this study are located in more or less liberal democratic environments and enjoy modest levels of governance arrangements, with the state playing a mostly supervisory role, e.g., the selection and appointment of university presidents in South Korea, Indonesia and Thailand.

The study highlighted the various strains on autonomy, either on account of external influences or the operational managerialisation required by the semi-industrial nature of the process required for efficient management of Open Universities. However, the study also confirmed that in almost all of the six institutions studied the basic tools, such as independent governing councils, faculty boards, budget practices, faculty appointment, quality assurance arrangements and curriculum design and transformation for achieving good governance, is present in one form or another, at least on paper. However, in practice, some aspects of autonomies (curriculum design) are much more easily achieved than others (finance, especially in private enterprises). Also, where there is an informed and strong leadership both at the institutional and governmental level more autonomous arrangements are achievable than in institutions where leadership is weak. Privately owned enterprises are especially vulnerable to greater control by owners despite the provisions for wide-ranging autonomies in the Acts and Charters of these institutions.

University governance, which ensures that institutions remain true to their chosen mission and accountable to their multiple stakeholders, including the societies where they are located, presents a clear mirror of whether the Open Universities are effectively fulfilling their developmental role and mission. It also provides an insight into the processes in place to ensure accountability, transparency and autonomy. This study gives us hope that as Asian Open Universities progress further into the 21st Century, they and their governments will see the value of greater autonomies on most aspects of university governance than currently prevails.

This study was based on a very limited sample but it attempted more than a cursory examination of governance processes. It is hoped that there will be more follow-up research on the core issue of governance will motivate larger scale studies on the subject in Asia.

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Appendix 1 — Survey Responses: Features of Governance in the Universities Studied

TRAITS	INDIA		MALAYSIA (Private)	INDONESIA (Public)	THAILAND (Public)	S. KOREA (Public)
	PRIVATE	**PUBLIC**				
Levels of Control by External Authority	High [BOD]	Moderate	High [BOD]	Low	Low	Moderate
Highest level of Authority	BOD	Board of Management	BOD/BOG	Senate [=Council]	Council [External]	Council [Internal]
Laws and Regulations of Governance	Act of Provincial Government and M&A	University Act	• University and University Colleges Act • Malaysian Qualification Act • University Constitution	National Education System Law [modified to suit UTI]	• National Education Act • Autonomous University Act	• National Education Act • Autonomous University Act
Funding	Sole Proprietors	Federal Government	Charitable Foundation and University	MOHE and University	MOHE and University	MOHE and University
Strategic Objectives	Developed Internally	Derived from Act and endorsed by MHRD	Developed internally and approved by BOD/BOG	Developed Internally and endorsed by MONE	Developed Internally & approved by MOE	Developed Internally and endorsed by MOE
Selection of CEO	BOD	Search committee appointed by MHRD with 2 members nominated by University Board	BOG/BOD	Appointed by MONE following search and short-listing of candidates by the University's selection Board.	Appointed by MONE following search and short-listing of candidates by the University's selection Board.	Appointed by MONE following search and short-listing of candidates by the University's selection Board.
Selection of Governors	BOD	BOM	BOD	University Staff both Faculty and Administrative	MOHE	Faculty
Employment Status	Contract with the institution	University employment safeguarded by UGC terms of contract (tenure	University Employment contract	• Civil Service • Uni. Contract	• Civil Service • Uni. Contract	• Civil Service • Uni. Contract

		appointment)				
Staff Remuneration	Institution management decision	UGC Scales valid for all public universities	BOD	Civil Service Conditions	Civil Service Conditions	Civil Service Conditions
Tuition Fees and	Institution decides but maximum limit regulated	University decides	University decides and approved by MOHE	MONE	MOHE	University proposes, and Ministry decides
Revenue Surpluses	Institution retains	University retains, can be applied for prescribed uses	University retains	University retains	University retains	University retains