

A composite image featuring a globe of the Earth. The globe is covered with a dense network of glowing yellow and green lines, representing global communication or data networks. A bright sun is rising over the horizon on the right side of the globe, casting a warm glow. The background is a dark blue gradient.

**Giving  
Asia her  
educational  
due**

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**E**CONOMICS plays a prime pragmatic role when it comes to considering graduate studies in Asia. With the Eurozone crisis affecting not only the ability of many European governments to keep their economies afloat, but also the purchasing power of its individual citizens, it is no surprise that students who wish to pursue their studies in Europe or other high-income nations will find themselves in a financial quandary.

An article in *Meld Magazine*, a non-profit outfit that caters to international students in Melbourne, Australia points out the struggle of some European students who have been hit by the Eurozone crisis. The devaluation of currency hits those on scholarships especially hard, impinging on their day-to-day expenses. Nevertheless, while the value of the Euro and the US dollar in the after effects of the subprime mortgage crisis struggle to find purchase, the cost of tuition and living expenses have yet to come to a similar decrease, making the outfit an increasingly unattractive option to students.

This particularly affects the Asian market, where in previous times families would use the stepping stone of overseas education to ensure that their children would be able to start a new life in a developed nation through first getting an education at a western university, and subsequently finding employment and achieving citizenship there. Unfortunately the employment markets of the US and UK, while recovering, has become an unpredictable place for immigrant professionals, and

as yet can hardly sustain the number of graduates they themselves produce. Meanwhile, the demand for specialists and professionals are only burgeoning in Asia, along with the increasing interest in previously western-dominated markets.

Tuition fees are another aspect that Asia is able to best most other options available. As an example, a master's degree from the University of Edinburgh business school can easily tally to RM79,232 for international students, not inclusive of living cost that could easily go over RM3,000 a month. Their local students don't fare much better, with their tuition fees costing only RM17,000 less, with the same amount of living costs. On the other hand, a master's degree from the National University of Singapore, a ranking university in the *Times Higher Education* lists, costs international students RM44,587, and studying an MBA at Thailand's private Assumption University that has its own on-campus mall will cost about RM40,865, and comes with a lower cost of living.

The quality of education offered by Asian universities has also increased significantly compared to even a decade ago, as the region becomes more developed and recognises the importance of educating citizens and creating specialisations and niches through

academic research. Institutions like the University of Tokyo, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology have been making waves as regional education competencies increase overall. While detractors may say that most regional higher education institutes are going nowhere fast in terms of research and development attributes, it is best to keep in mind that Asia as a whole is still developing, and is catching up to the developed world at a prodigious rate.

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**Professor Abdul Rahman Othman, Deputy Dean (Academic Affairs), Institute of Postgraduate Studies, USM**

country's desire to lift itself out of the middle-income category and into the high-income bracket. Grants and other forms of financial incentives from both the government and corporate sector are helping to speed up the establishment of Malaysia's own academic research and development niche.

While support is being given to

existing institutions, the environment in Malaysia has also encouraged the creation of many new private universities as well as welcomed the presence of foreign branch campuses on local soil. Currently there are over 600 educational institutions in Malaysia, a number that includes public universities, private universities, university colleges and colleges, foreign branch campuses, polytechnics and community colleges. The ministry has also made an effort to affect some form of uniformity with the international academic arena by scheduling the semesters to coincide with those of the international system.

"Malaysian higher education institutions offer a wide variety of postgraduate courses at competitive tuition fees," says Professor Abdul Rahman Othman, the Deputy Dean (Academic Affairs), Institute of Postgraduate Studies, USM, touching on the fact that Malaysia is a practical choice in terms of economics, quality and potential for development. "Malaysian academics who supervise postgraduate students are graduates of internationally and locally renowned universities, and are well-versed in research and publication. The institutions complement their academics with modern and up-to-date laboratories, information technology and communication systems, libraries, study and recreational spaces and facilities. Most institutions also offer affordable housing on campus."

At the same time, Malaysia is also carving her own academic niches. One of the main points of academic focus is Islamic Studies, especially topics concerning Islamic finance. As Malaysia is gunning for the position of foremost global Islamic finance hub, the crea-

tion of the Malaysia Islamic Financial Centre to aid this idea through commerce and business practices, and the International Centre for Education in Islamic Finance that awards graduate degrees in financial specialisations should come as an encouraging move. In terms of new content, Universiti Putra Malaysia's Graduate School of Business's philosophy of human governance is also making waves as an alternative to the long held principles of human resources, offering an ethical and spiritual alternative that may change the face of the business world as we know it.

Another aspect that makes Malaysia an attractive location to pursue graduate studies is its unique situation as a cultural hub, food heaven and a centre from which other cultures and countries are easily accessible. "Malaysia is well known for its population diversity and globalised society," comments Professor Abdul Rahman. "It is a platform that liberally connects the east and the west, including religions and cultures."

However, the key area in postgraduate education that sets us apart from other countries in Southeast Asia is western style postgraduate courses and programmes offered in English, taught or supervised by academics that are trained internationally or are familiar with international expectations at affordable prices."

The case for Asia, and especially for Malaysia, as the new wellspring of education is still evolving, but if the current enthusiastic approach being practiced by those involved is anything to go by, there is sure to be a lot more development on this front. We can only wait and see what the future holds.