

# Research at public policy schools in the Asia-Pacific region ranked

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## Abstract

This article presents the first-ever ranking of public policy schools in the Asia-Pacific region based on their research publication output. We used Scopus as our bibliographic database to assess the publication output of 45 schools between 2014 and 2018, based on affiliations listed on the publications rather than current faculty. The results show substantial variation in terms of research output; elite research schools are located in China, Australia, and Singapore. Ranking by total citations, three schools stand out—the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University, the Lee Kuan Yew School at the National University of Singapore, and the School of Public Policy & Management at Tsinghua University in China. Ranking by impact factor shows that the School of Government at Peking University and the Melbourne School of Government at Melbourne University are the two top-ranked schools, but because of their relatively small research output in this period, their true rank is very uncertain.

## KEYWORDS

Asia, citation analysis, confidence interval, public policy school, ranking, statistical analysis

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Public policy schools<sup>1</sup> have become increasingly prominent in tertiary education in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>2</sup> As of 2020, 45 institutions in 12 countries in the region can be classified as research active schools of public policy—defined here as stand-alone and professionally oriented academic institutions of tertiary education that offer postgraduate degrees (i.e., Master's, PhD) in public policy, public administration, and public or international affairs.<sup>3</sup> Most of these institutions were only launched in the last 15 years.

Emulating long-standing models in the United States and Europe that provide current and future policymakers with applied interdisciplinary training in public policy analysis and management, public policy schools in the region have aligned themselves with the trend towards professional education that has long existed in law and business schools in the region—some in collaboration with partners abroad (Chesterman, 2008; Schlegelmilch, 2020, p. 98; Steel & Taylor, 2009).<sup>4</sup>

Rapid socio-economic and political change in the region has underpinned these developments. Not only has this change prompted rapid expansion of tertiary education, both public and private, and rising numbers of students, it has also encouraged more postgraduate training and efforts to create educational institutions that compete for student and faculty talent regionally and internationally (Asian Development Bank, 2011; UNESCO, 2014). Meanwhile, processes of democratisation and globalisation affecting the region have also heightened awareness that the education of those engaged in the public policy process must be reinforced if they are to meet the ever-growing demands on state institutions in the 21st century (Bice et al., 2018).

Perhaps more than any other tertiary institution, public policy schools have begun to occupy a new, and necessary, place in Asia's educational landscape—one that resonates with the developmental state narratives in the region, such as the widely accepted notions of merit-based, technocratic governance in parts of East and Southeast Asia, while also responding directly to the complex new realities of Asia's transforming states and societies.

However, as yet there is little comparative evidence of how these programs and schools compare with each other. We compare the publication output of 45 schools with at least one publication listed in Scopus<sup>5</sup> between 2014 and 2018, based on affiliations listed on the publications rather than current faculty.<sup>6</sup> Output measures were the number of publications and the number of citations each received through 2019. Aggregate output data by school produces a ranking in 2019 by 5-year citation impact factor, complemented by the standard error of the impact factor; total citations; number of publications; median citations; and a 5-year h-index.

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<sup>1</sup>Terminology differs: while some schools in the region explicitly label themselves 'Public Policy Schools', others prefer 'School of Government', or 'School of Public Administration'. We use 'public policy school' as a catch-all that aligns with our selection criteria.

<sup>2</sup>The Asia-Pacific region is comprised of states in East Asia (7), Southeast Asia (11), South Asia (8), and Oceania (29).

<sup>3</sup>Closely related degrees include Master of Public Affairs, Master of International Affairs, and Master of Public Service, to name a few.

<sup>4</sup>See also, for example, <https://u2b.com/2020/05/28/business-schools-in-asia-are-growing-in-popularity-and-quality/>.

<sup>5</sup>Scopus is an online abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature including scientific journals, books, and conference proceedings published by Elsevier.

<sup>6</sup>Six of these schools had no citations in 2019 to their 2014–2018 publications and so are not listed in Table 2.

Public policy programs in the Asia-Pacific region do not have regional accreditation standards to meet like those recently adopted in Europe.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps even more surprising, so far there has been no ranking of public policy schools in the region. Granted, this is not a problem for Asia alone. Even in the United States, where the market for public policy schools is perhaps most competitive, efforts to rank them have remained challenging. In Asia, where public policy schools have emerged from a diversity of domestic structures, comparisons are difficult from a practical as well as a conceptual perspective. Despite these difficulties, we present here the first ranking of public policy schools in the Asia-Pacific region.

We select schools based on the criteria laid out in Section 2 of this article. This involves subjective judgement about what is or is not a public policy school. However, we are confident that we have included all the most important schools. We rank schools according to their research performance, as this is publicly available data that is easy to compare on a common basis. This does not mean that other aspects of a school's performance in education and policy impact are not important. Ideally, these would also be assessed in future research.

Overall, our analysis shows substantial variation in terms of research output, both in quality and quantity.

- Elite research schools are located in China, Australia, and Singapore. Ranking by total citations, three schools stand out: the Crawford School at the Australian National University, the Lee Kuan Yew School at the National University of Singapore, and the School of Public Policy & Management at Tsinghua University in China. These three schools have both a high number of publications and relatively high impact factors. Ranking by impact factor shows that the School of Government at Peking University and the Melbourne School of Government at Melbourne University are the two top-ranked schools, but because of their small research output in our sample period, there is greater uncertainty about their true rank.
- Other schools in our sample have more diverse performance. Some do well in terms of their 5-year citation impact factor but have few publications, while others have a reasonable (but not high) number of publications but a low impact factor. A third group of six schools in our sample were omitted from the impact factor and total citations rankings, as they had no citations in Scopus in 2019 to publications published between 2014 and 2018—thus highlighting a considerable gap in the performance of public policy schools across the region.
- Perhaps somewhat surprising is the low ranking of public policy schools in Japan and India—both countries with a considerable number of public policy schools, but none in the top 10 schools when ranked by 5-year citation impact factor or total number of citations. By contrast, Australia and China do very well. Australia has three out of the top 10 schools ranked by impact factor and citations, despite its small population size. China, on the other hand, has at least five schools ranked in the top 10 across both rankings, which is remarkable given that many of these schools were only established in the last 15 years (though linked to well-established research universities).

Section 2 lays out our methods. This is followed by the results in Section 3, and finally, the discussion and conclusions in Section 4.

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<sup>7</sup>See European Association for Public Administration Accreditation (EAPAA), <https://www.eapaa.eu/>.

## 2 | METHODS

Ash and Urquiola (2020) rank US public policy schools based on their research publication output. They collected the names of about 5000 faculty at 44 schools and used bibliographic databases to gather measures of the quality and quantity of faculty publications, such as number of articles and books written, the quality of the journals that published the articles, and the number of citations each received. Hence, they assess schools based on the career-long track record of their current faculty. Instead, we assess the output of schools based on the affiliations listed on the publications. Though some faculty may have moved since publication, the numbers should be small given that we do not assess any items published before 2014. Hence, while Ash and Urquiola (2020) include all publications of current faculty whenever they were published, we are assessing the research environment at a school at the time of publication.

Four criteria guided selection of the sample of public policy schools:

1. The school needs to be a stand-alone organisational unit with its own faculty and budget.
2. The school offers a postgraduate degree in public policy, public administration, or a closely related degree that has public policy analysis and management at its core.
3. In addition to its academic focus, the school is committed to training professionals: the Master's is a terminal degree in that it trains students to work as a policy analyst in government, think tanks, or the private sector.
4. The school has at least one publication listed in Scopus between 2014 and 2018, inclusive.<sup>8</sup>

Web searches, country registries of schools, and school websites produced an initial sample of 115 schools, which after applying our criteria was reduced to a sample of 45 institutions across 12 countries in the Asia-Pacific region (Table 1).

We use Scopus to identify the research output of each school because it has broader coverage of the social sciences than the Web of Science. Google Scholar has even better coverage but is not easy to work with; researchers need to use web-scraping rather than downloading data. It also is rather noisy because it is only minimally curated. The main downside to using Scopus is that we miss most monographs, which are important in some policy disciplines, though we do pick up a considerable number of chapters from edited volumes. Additionally, all these databases are biased towards the English language literature.

We used variations on a school's name to search in Scopus for its 2014–2018 publications. We then requested a citation report on those publications. We compute the following indicators from the citations of the publications in 2019.

- **5-year citation impact factor:** This is identical to the impact factor reported for academic journals, but we compute it for a school rather than a journal. It is the mean number of citations received in 2019 by a publication published between 2014 and 2018. This can be seen as an estimate of research quality.

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<sup>8</sup>We dropped Zhejiang University in China because Scopus seems to systematically under-assign publications to this affiliation.

TABLE 1 Country sample

Country	Number of schools
Australia	5
China	9
India	6
Indonesia	1
Japan	13
Malaysia	1
New Zealand	1
Pakistan	1
Philippines	1
Singapore	1
South Korea	4
Thailand	2

- **Standard error of the 5-year impact factor:** Citations vary radically across a typical sample of publications and fluctuate from year to year. The standard error reflects the uncertainty related to using the impact factor as a measure of the quality of a school's research (Stern, 2013). It is computed as the standard deviation of citations to a school's 2014–2018 publications in 2019 divided by the square root of the number of publications in the 2014–2018 period. If most of a school's citations come from a small number of publications, the standard error will be larger than if citations are consistent across more publications. If a school only has a small number of publications, the standard error will also be larger because it is harder to infer the true mean from a smaller sample. We can use the standard error to compute a confidence interval for the impact factor.
- **Total citations:** Because the impact factor does not depend on the size of a school (though its standard error does), it is a size-adjusted measure of research impact. Total 2019 citations to 2014–2018 publications give us an idea of total research activity at a school. Size tends to be related to impact (Bruns & Stern, 2016). In our sample, the correlation between the impact factor and total citations is 0.47.
- **Number of publications:** An alternative measure of size is the number of publications. The correlation between the number of publications and total citations is 0.99. Between the number of publications and impact factor, the correlation is 0.44.
- **Median citations:** As is well known, the distribution of citations is very skewed, so that the mean is not necessarily the best measure of average citations. We also compute the median 2019 citations to 2014–2018 publications. With one exception, all schools fall into one of four classes for median citations: 2, 1, 0.5, or 0 citations. The School of Governance and Public Policy, Indonesia, has median citations of 4 but only two publications. Schools with relatively high median citations compared to their mean citations have more consistent citation performance across publications.
- **H-index:** The h-index (Hirsch, 2005) combines both quantity and quality dimensions in a similar way to total citations. We use the approach of Google Scholar's h-index for academic

journals. We compute the total citations from 2014 through 2019 for each publication and then sort each school's publications in order of the number of citations received. The number of publications whose citations are equal to or greater than their rank is the school's h-index. The correlation between the h-index and total citations is 0.85.

### 3 | RESULTS

Table 2 presents the statistics computed for the 39 schools with one or more citations in 2019 to their publications in 2014–2018. We found no citations in 2019 for the other six schools for which we found publications in Scopus; five of these did have citations in earlier years. Except for the Lee Kuan Yew School (LKY) at the National University of Singapore and the School of Government and Public Policy (SGPP), Indonesia, all of the top 10 schools ranked by impact factor are in China or Australia. In terms of total citations, three large schools have more than 1000 citations: the Crawford School at the Australian National University (Crawford), LKY, and the School of Public Policy & Management at Tsinghua (Tsinghua). Each of these schools also had more than 300 publications. Only two other schools, the School of Government, Peking University (Peking), and the School of Government, Melbourne University (Melbourne), had more than 100 publications. Four schools have median citations of 2: Peking; School of Public Administration and Policy, Renmin People's University of China (Renmin); School of International and Public Affairs, Shanghai Jiao Tong University; and School of Governance and Society, University of Management and Technology, Pakistan.

Figure 1 shows the 5-year citation impact factors with 90% confidence intervals; those for some schools include zero. This dramatically illustrates the uncertainty related to the impact factors for schools with relatively small research output, such as Peking, Melbourne, and SGPP. Statistically, their impact factors will not be significantly different from many of the lower-ranked schools. However, it is clear that Tsinghua, Crawford, Renmin, and LKY have higher research impact than many lower-ranked schools, such as the School of Government, Victoria University of Wellington, the Osaka School of International Public Policy, Osaka University, or the Graduate School of Public Administration, Seoul National University.

Of course, it is possible to reduce these standard errors by using citations over a longer period of time. However, research performance will likely change over time and a ranking based on a longer period of data will be less current.

To visualise the relationship between size and quality, Figure 2 plots schools' 5-year citation impact factors against the number of their publications. We can see a general positive correlation between size and impact factor. Schools with high impact factors and low numbers of publications tend to have very wide confidence intervals around the impact factor. Three large schools stand out at the right: Crawford, LKY, and Tsinghua. They all have relatively high impact factors. In this figure, lines of constant total citations would decline from the top left to the bottom right. We also include a ranking by total citations in Table 2. This combines both quality, which is often quite uncertain on its own, and quantity. As mentioned, the three schools with the largest number of publications rank in the top three positions by total citations. The School of Global, Urban, and Social Studies at RMIT, Peking, and the School of Public Administration at Hohai University fill out the next three spots.

TABLE 2 Public policy schools ranked by citation impact factor

Ranking by citation impact factor	Ranking by total citations	Name	Abbreviation	Country	5-year citation impact factor	Standard error of impact factor	Total citations	Median citations	Number of publications	H-index
1	5	School of Government, Peking University	Peking	China	5.36	2.23	359	2	67	13
2	10	Melbourne School of Government, University of Melbourne	Melbourne	Australia	4.22	1.82	194	1	46	10
3	29	School of Government and Public Policy	SGPP	Indonesia	4	2	8	4	2	2
4	4	School of Global, Urban, and Social Studies, RMIT University	RMIT	Australia	3.84	0.83	388	1	101	21
5	1	Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University	Crawford	Australia	3.67	0.64	2694	1	734	33
6	3	School of Public Policy and Management, Tsinghua University	Tsinghua	China	3.38	0.32	1018	1	301	25
7	7	School of Public Administration, Renmin People's University of China	Renmin	China	3.17	0.44	263	2	83	13
8	2	Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore	LKY	Singapore	2.98	0.46	1593	1	534	25
9	8	School of International and Public Affairs, Shanghai Jiao Tong University	Shanghai Jiao Tong	China	2.87	0.36	241	2	84	13

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Ranking by citation impact factor	Ranking by total citations	Name	Abbreviation	Country	5-year citation impact factor	Standard error of impact factor	Total citations	Median citations	Number of publications	H-index
10	6	School of Public Administration, Hohai University	Hohai	China	2.86	0.43	309	1	108	14
11	28	School of Public Policy and Management, Guanxi University	Guanxi	China	2.75	1.93	22	0.5	8	4
12	25	Division of Public Policy, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	HKUST	China	2.75	2.10	11	1	4	1
13	16	Sir Walter Murdoch School of Public Policy and International Affairs, Murdoch University	Murdoch	Australia	2.54	0.76	71	0.5	28	9
14	9	School of Public Economics and Administration, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics	Shanghai U Fin & Econ	China	2.50	0.40	240	1	96	15
15	19	JSW School of Public Policy, Indian Institute of Technology	JSW IIT	India	2.31	0.77	37	1	16	5
16	26	School of Governance and Society, University of Management and Technology	U of Manag & Tech	Pakistan	2.17	0.17	13	2	6	3
17	11	School of Government, Sun Yat-sen University	Sun Yat Sen	China	1.92	0.28	175	1	91	10





TABLE 2 (Continued)

Ranking by citation impact factor	Ranking by total citations	Name	Abbreviation	Country	5-year citation impact factor	Standard error of impact factor	Total citations	Median citations	Number of publications	H-index
18	17	Graduate School of Public Policy, University of Tokyo	Tokyo	Japan	1.88	0.43	64	1	34	7
19	23	School of Public Policy, Chiang Mai University	Chiang Mai	Thailand	1.85	0.59	24	1	13	3
20	13	KDI School of Public Policy and Management, Korea Development Institute	KDI	South Korea	1.75	0.34	138	1	30	8
21	12	Graduate School of Public Administration, Seoul National University	Seoul Nat	South Korea	1.51	0.22	140	1	93	10
22	20	School of Public Administration, National Institute of Development Administration	NIDA	Thailand	1.50	0.51	33	1	22	4
23	15	Osaka School of International Public Policy, Osaka University	Osaka	Japan	1.38	0.29	88	0	64	8
24	14	School of Government, Victoria University of Wellington	Victoria U Wellington	New Zealand	1.37	0.27	100	1	73	9
25	31	Ateneo School of Government, Ateneo de Manila University	Ateneo	Philippines	1.17	0.75	7	0	6	2
26	18	Graduate School of Governance, Sungkyunkwan University	Sungkyunkwan	South Korea	1.12	0.19	47	1	42	6

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Ranking by citation impact factor	Ranking by total citations	Name	Abbreviation	Country	5-year citation impact factor	Standard error of impact factor	Total citations	Median citations	Number of publications	H-index
27	24	Graduate School of Governance Studies, Meiji University	Meiji	Japan	1.05	0.34	23	0.5	22	5
28	32	School of Public Policy and Governance, Tata Institute of Social Sciences	TISS	India	1.00	0.77	5	0	5	2
29	21	Graduate School of Policy Studies, Kwansei Gakuin	Kwansei Gakuin	Japan	0.97	0.37	33	0	34	7
30	22	Graduate School of International Relations, International University of Japan	International U Japan	Japan	0.93	0.23	27	0	29	5
31	30	Jindal School of Government and Public Policy, O.P. Jindal Global University	Jindal	India	0.89	0.39	8	0	9	2
32	35	Graduate School of Policy Science, Ritsumeikan University	Ritsumeikan	Japan	0.67	0.67	2	0	3	1
33	34	School of Policy and Governance, Azim Premji University	Azim Premji	India	0.60	0.40	3	0	5	2
34	39	Hokkaido University Public Policy School, Hokkaido University	Hokkaido	Japan	0.50	0.50	1	0.5	2	1

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Ranking by citation impact factor	Ranking by total citations	Name	Abbreviation	Country	5-year citation impact factor	Standard error of impact factor	Total citations	Median citations	Number of publications	H-index
35	36	Graduate School of Public Policy and Civic Engagement, Kyung Hee University	Kyung Hee	South Korea	0.40	0.40	2	0	5	2
36	37	Graduate School of Government, University of Sydney	Sydney	Australia	0.40	0.40	2	0	5	1
37	27	School of Social Sciences (Centre for the Study of Law and Governance), Jawaharlal Nehru University	Nehru	India	0.25	0.16	13	0	51	2
38	33	School of International and Public Policy, Hitotsubashi University	Hitotsubashi	Japan	0.21	0.16	4	0	19	1
39	38	Graduate School of Policy Studies, Iwate Prefectural University	Iwate	Japan	0.13	0.09	2	0	16	13

Note: The following schools had zero citations in 2019 to their 2014–2018 publications: Graduate School of Policy Studies, Chuo University, Japan; Ghazali Shafie Graduate School of Government, Universiti Utara, Malaysia; Graduate School of Public Policy, Kyoto Prefectural University, Japan; Graduate School of Policy and Management, Doshisha University, Japan; Graduate School of Public Policy and Social Governance, Hosei University, Japan; Mumbai School of Economics and Public Policy, University of Mumbai, India.

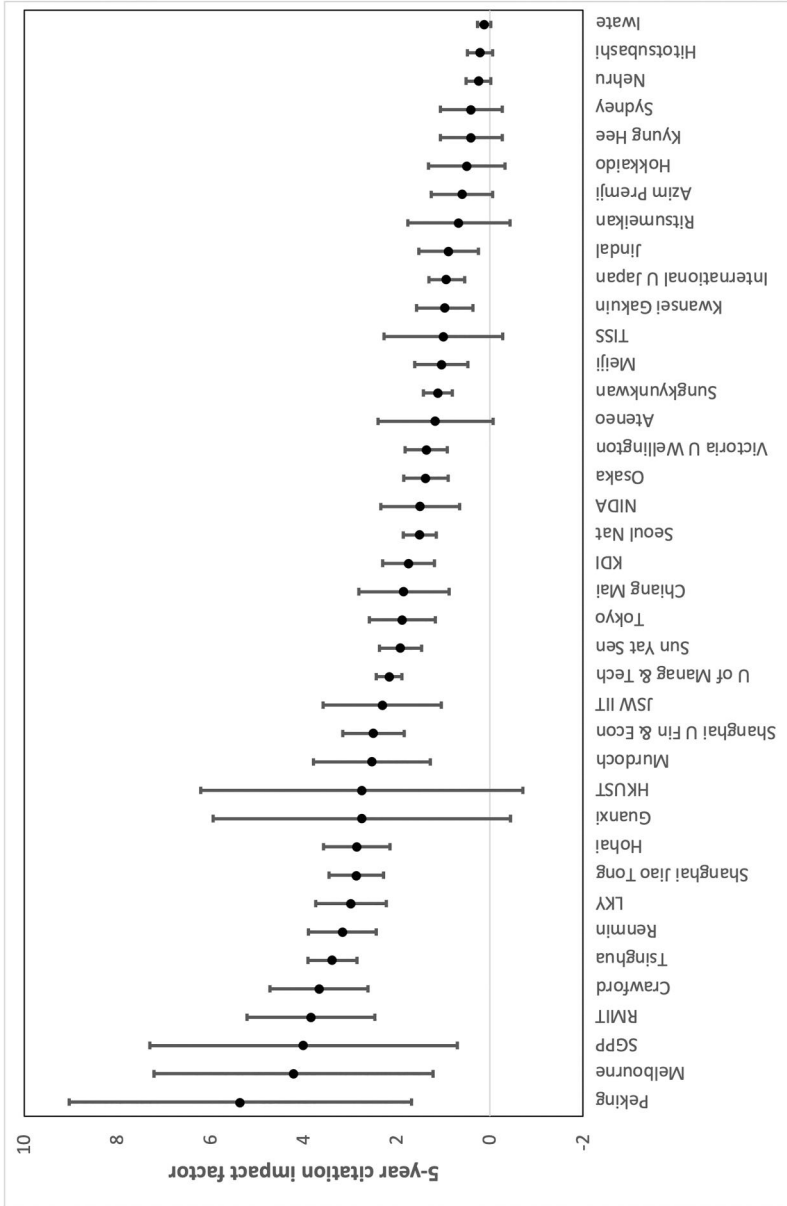


FIGURE 1 5-year citation impact factor and 90% confidence interval. Abbreviations: see Table 2

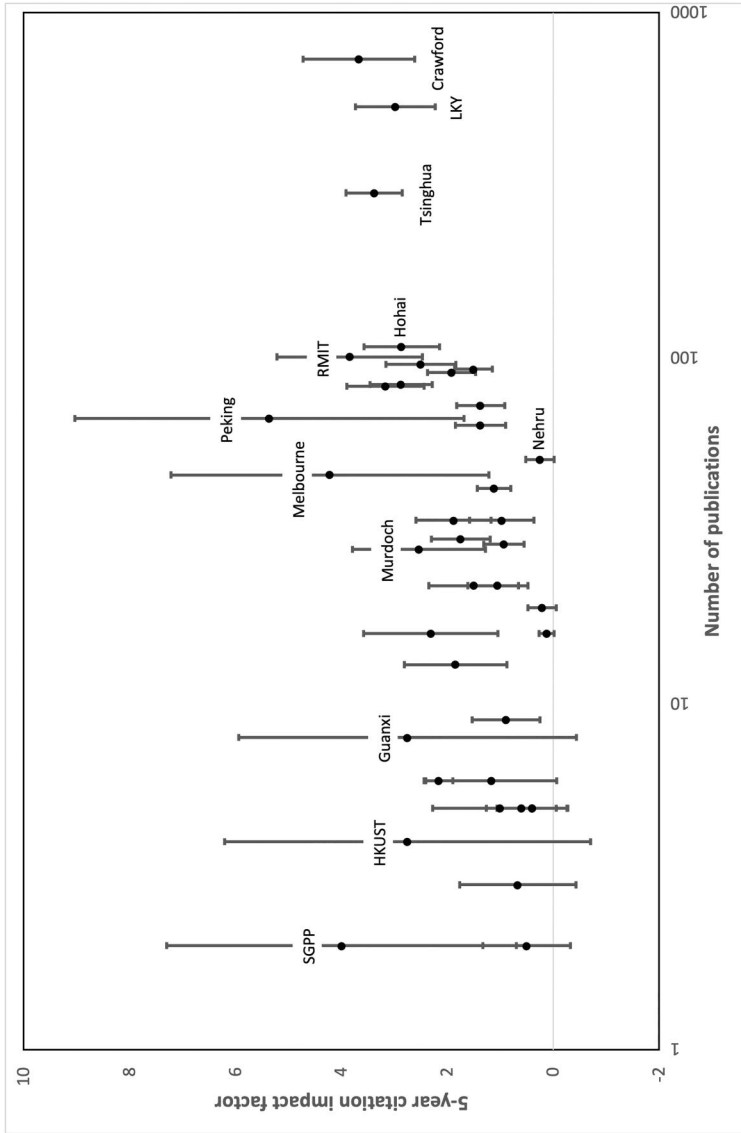


FIGURE 2 5-year citation impact factor and 90% confidence interval and number of publications. Abbreviations: see Table 2

## 4 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This article provides a first-ever research ranking of public policy schools in the Asia-Pacific. Considering the considerable growth in the number of public policy schools in the region over the past two decades against the background of rising income and education levels, this exercise is long overdue.

Emulating models from abroad, the recent emergence of these interdisciplinary and professionally oriented schools seems to respond to a growing demand in the region for skills such as public policy analysis, management, and leadership among both students and public institutions alike. Our analysis sheds light on several features specific to this trend.

First, this growth has been highly uneven in terms of geographic spread. Most schools are located in East Asia (China and Japan), and to a lesser extent South Asia (India) and Southeast Asia (Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia). Oceania, by contrast, has yet to see any public policy schools established beyond those in Australia and New Zealand.<sup>9</sup> While this reflects wider challenges for the tertiary sector in small, dispersed, and low population Pacific Island states in Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia,<sup>10</sup> the concentration and dramatic rise in public policy schools in East Asia is remarkable in itself—possibly highlighting both legacies of bureaucratic state-led development and efforts to gradually internationalise tertiary education.

Second, there are major differences in research output among schools in the region. The three top schools account for 54% of publications and 63% of citations from the region, with many schools producing much less. Faculty size and composition, the research environment, and a school's international outlook are factors that might come into play here.

Finally, what is striking is the strong 5-year citation impact factor of a few elite Chinese public policy schools, particularly compared to schools in Japan and South Korea. We speculate that the elite Chinese universities may be performing better because they are focusing on less politically risky global policy issues, such as climate change, rather than domestic policy issues. As a result, they publish more in and are cited more by the literature in English. Nevertheless, the considerable rise in both the quantity and quality of the research output of public policy schools in China is remarkable, especially since many have been in existence for less than 15 years.

Certainly, the findings need to be read carefully. For instance, future research may further calibrate the findings, as some schools may have high citations because their faculties publish in fields that generally have high citations, such as climate change related research. This might be controlled for by adjusting citations by average citations in each field. That can be done simply by multiplying raw citation numbers by the mean in the whole sample divided by the mean for that field (Stern & Tol, 2021). That was not done here because assigning book chapters to fields is uncertain.

Similarly, as is commonly done for university rankings (e.g., QS World University Rankings), a more comprehensive ranking of public policy schools could include other weighted dimensions, such as indicators for reputation, quality of education, quality of faculty, and public

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<sup>9</sup> An exception here is the School of Business and Public Policy at the University of Papua New Guinea—a collaboration with the Australian National University's Crawford School of Public Policy, and financially supported by the Australian Government.

<sup>10</sup> For more detailed discussion, see *Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) 2018–2030: Moving towards education 2030*, University of South Pacific and Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Pacific-Regional-Education-Framework-PacREF-2018-2030.pdf>.

policy impact in addition to research output. However, this is not only a very different exercise, it would require the collection of very different data and ultimately cooperation from the institutions surveyed.

In short, this research ranking should be seen as simply a starting point for a wider conversation about the nature and performance of public policy schools in the Asia-Pacific region: future studies might take a closer look at the types of research conducted and the curricula of these institutions, and how they may differ from those of public policy schools in other parts of the world.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, such a conversation is central to the training of future public sector leaders in the region, given the potential to shape the nature of governance in the region for decades to come. We hope that this ranking will give impetus to this conversation and stimulate related research.

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## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

Both authors are employed at the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University, which is included in the sample of public policy schools.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Both authors contributed to all parts of the study apart from the statistical analysis which was carried out by David Stern.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Figshare at <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14080061>.

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<sup>11</sup>See, for a similar discussion in regards to the research performance of Asia Pacific Business Schools, Mudambi et al. (2018).

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