

cation system, this book can be rated as one of the most comprehensive commentaries on the subject. The major strength of this book lies in its detailed historical account of the Thai higher education system. The book picks up key policy innovations and attempts to rationalize the policy reforms by integrating national, regional and global contexts into its main theoretical premise of policy borrowing. The book is strengthened by the author's access to key policymakers and leading technocrats whose accounts and opinions regarding the development of higher education are informative and reliable sources of information. However, by highlighting each policy innovation — which mirrored attempts to modernize higher education through reform by both the central government and HEIs — the book tends to be biased towards a centralized top-down policy analysis, thus emphasizing the pivotal role of the state and its satellite agencies to the emergence and success of reforms. In reality, the reform of the Thai higher education sector also owes a fair amount to a combination of stakeholders, including employees and students. This especially seems to be the case with issues regarding university rankings and quality assurance. Another source of analytical deficit in this book which, had it been addressed, might have made it more solid is the analysis of the interplay between the state — through the government agencies such as OHEC or the independent regulator such as the ONESQA — and HEIs. As a matter of fact, HEIs in Thailand have developed a distinctive character as independent actors with the leverage and freedom to steer their institutional courses. Therefore, in order to fully understand the causes and implications of reform in the Thai higher education sector, one also needs to make sense of the power play between these two actors. Finally, a minor point of weakness which may strike readers in the field is the book's emphasis on an elite group of first-tier HEIs. Thailand's HEIs are actually divided into several groups which may be affected by and respond to the shifting nature of global, regional and national reform differently. Focusing only on the elite group may not be realistic or lead to the wrong conclusions

about the culture of borrowing in the Thai higher education sector.

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***Innovation Networks and the New Asian Regionalism: A Knowledge Platform on Economic Productivity.* By Hans-Peter Brunner.** Glos, U.K. and MA, USA: Edward Elgar and Asian Development Bank, 2016. Pp. 208.

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Political debates about globalization have focused on offshore outsourcing of manufacturing and services. However, the debates neglect important changes in the geography of knowledge, such as the emergence of innovative networks and economic productivity leading to a rapid integration of dispersed engineering, product development and research across borders. This new form of innovation networks has led Hans-Peter Brunner to write this thoughtful and well-researched book. He attempts to explain the linkage between national markets and regional cooperation and integration (RCI), which contributes to medium and long-term productivity growth.

The author looks at how RCI policy instruments can be used to identify regional integration drivers. He has done this through analysing the experiences and success stories of RCI initiatives in the Baltic Sea Region and proposes similar initiatives in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Asian Economic Community (AEC). He suggests a knowledge toolbox known as the ASEAN Regional Economic Integration Observatory (AREIO) to tackle productivity slowdowns and create what he terms an innovation-cluster-ecology.

Chapter 1 highlights existing RCI policy instruments in emerging economies and shows that they fall short in areas such as competition, skills and innovation incentives, agglomeration for cluster development, economic corridor development and connectivity, trade facilitation and technology transfer. Besides that, this chapter finds that the inability to capture greater value from traded services and production caused large productivity differentials between these economies. Hence, an integrated regional economic structure is essential in capturing value-added along trade networks.

The Eastern European economies have done well in integrating with regional and global value chains (GVCs), whereas Central Asian economies have been unable to do so simply due to inaccessible markets and low economic density. An important feature of the European Union RCI was “cohesion” policies, coordinated on a regional level to tackle rising inequalities. Therefore, a good RCI initiative can help to: reduce disadvantages in geographic structure; lessen the cumulative value of tariff and non-tariff barriers; and eliminate regulatory gaps and weaknesses in firm structure, productivity heterogeneity and labour market inequalities. Although a small point in the chapter, the author stresses the need to financially include the regional small and medium-sized enterprises in RCI initiatives as they play a crucial role in the ecology and value-added activities along regional and global value chains.

Chapter 2 argues that the Baltic Sea Region greatly benefited from proactive government policies, such as fiscal, cohesion, labour market and financial inclusive measures. These countries have inclusionary policies undertaken at national levels that can be influenced by regional consensual coordination mechanisms. For instance, the BSR effectively used steering groups to create horizontal policy coordination by setting common goals for regional technology platforms, innovation cluster networks, as well as diagnostic and indicator-based tools and infrastructure. This allowed free movement of researchers, knowledge and technology across the region. Nonetheless, the author was not coherent in explaining the

challenges that the BSR faced in establishing the steering group.

Chapter 2 also maps the policy tools applied throughout the BSR and how they affect regional embeddedness, connectivity and proximity. Particularly, it was found that the European Cluster Observatory (ECO) fared well in reaching its stated policy goals. The BSR experience recommends strengthening traditional GVCs oriented towards foreign markets by developing networks of strong clusters in the region; assessing investments and policy actions with a dedicated cross-border focus; and, last but not least, identifying common competitiveness challenges and sharing how to learn to address them.

With such optimism, Chapter 3 looks at the existing innovative clusters in the GMS, as well as parts of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) area. Whilst a “bottom-up” as well as a “top-down” driven institutional regional integration and skill-based innovation structure was evident in the case of the BSR, this was not the case in the GMS nor CAREC groupings. Regional innovation capacity-building was influenced by the relative importance of intra-regional versus extra-regional economic asymmetry (p. 55). Using value-added trade flows, the author found that trade structures in GMS countries are characterized by extra-regional interdependence in global value chains, whereas intra-industry trade has been sharply increasing and is reflected in deepening structure of value chain specialisation.

For instance, innovation cluster developments in Thailand, Vietnam and Yunnan province in China indicate low levels of research and development (R&D) resources and activities. Improving production efficiency was a policy initiative among these GMS economies, instead of product innovation. There was no strong R&D linkage between local and foreign companies and the rest of the world, as these GMS economies attracted foreign direct investment through high quality infrastructure inside economic zones and excluded hinterlands. Worse still, skilled labour in GMS countries was undersupplied and language and cultural differences are still key barriers for

foreign business expansion. Hence, GMS and CAREC markets are still dependent on central, urban nodes located at the coast for the integration into GVCs.

This chapter could have had an additional section on the experiences of cluster-led developments in Singapore and/or the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle (SIJORI), which would have certainly added support to the author's primary goal of an AREIO.

Finally, Chapter 4 and Appendices 1 to 4 draw heavily on the RCI lessons learnt from the BSR experience and relate it to the GMS contexts. The author formulates metrics that make achievements visible under the innovation-cluster-ecology-directed initiatives. In addition, he uses degrees of proximity, embeddedness and connectivity across

the GMS to offer a road map for the setup and operability of AREIO. Whilst it is interesting to identify road maps and initiatives, the author notes that it is important to have knowledge platforms for prioritization, monitoring, sharing and learning if AREIO is to ever come to fruition.

In conclusion, this book provides an interesting and original study of current and future RCI developments. It is unique in its attempts to identify and compare the experiences of the BSR with Asia's regionalism initiatives.

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