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# BOOK REVIEWS

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*Financing the Development of Higher Education in Singapore.* By Mukul G. Asher. Singapore: Regional Institute of Higher Learning (RIHED), 1984. Pp. 64.

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Education is generally considered a positive factor in socio-economic development. It is thus considered in the Republic of Singapore where much attention has been given to manpower development. Dr Mukul Asher, an expert on Public Finance at the National University of Singapore, examines the financing of higher education in Singapore for the period 1972 to 1983. Using Annual Reports of various institutions of higher learning for data on receipts and recurrent expenditures, supplemented with interviews and other data provided by officials of these institutions, he identifies trends in the revenue and expenditure structures. Data on development expenditure are obtained from Financial Statements and Budget documents of the Republic of Singapore since the government accounts for the bulk of development expenditure for higher education.

The main objective of the study "is to examine the present mode of financing expenditure of higher education institutions and to discuss implications of alternative means of financing

such expenditure....[N]o attempt is made to analyze whether the resources are being managed optimally.... (p. 4)"

In five brief chapters, including an introduction, the author gives a historical description of the higher education system in Singapore, and examines the trend in per student cost and the main determinants of recurrent and development expenditures of these institutions. He distinguishes between private costs, social costs, and institutional costs but adopts only the last vantage point. For purposes of the study, he defines total costs of higher educational institutions to include only direct recurrent and capital costs for which financing has to be found. Moreover, in estimating per student cost, development expenditure is excluded to avoid distortion that would otherwise result due to the lumpiness of capital expenditure. He also alerts the reader to the difficulty of estimating full-student equivalents considering the number of part-time students, short non-degree training, and diploma and certificate programmes. The above qualifications and attention to technical details reflect the high quality of the analysis.

In Chapter 4 he examines the various sources of revenue of these institutions. "To summarize, the revenue structure of higher educational institutions is dominated by government grants with other sources providing about one-tenth of

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total recurrent receipts (p. 44).” On the whole, the fee structure has exhibited relative stability while “others” have contributed only negligible amounts.

In Chapter 5 he considers financing options for development of higher education after an informative digression into methods of planning for higher education, namely: cost-benefit, free market and manpower planning. “While manpower planning is the predominant system in Singapore, the possibility of individuals enrolling in higher education institutions abroad has also meant an additional avenue for pursuing tertiary education along essentially free market lines (p. 54).”

After considering the arguments for and against, Asher rejects the self-financing option because “this will restrict social and economic mobility and allow subjective as opposed to objective criteria to determine access to higher education”. Some readers, however, may disagree with his classification of “income and family status” as subjective factors while classifying “scholastic performance” as an objective factor.

Full state-financing option is likewise considered but the author concludes that this is more likely to be adopted at the primary and secondary levels than at the tertiary level. “The more usual case...is substantial...but not total support by the state for tertiary level education...[I]n Singapore predominant state support is combined with manpower planning of higher education.”

Finally, Mukul Asher suggests that an increase in the share of tuition fees may merit consideration in view of changing requirements and demands for higher education. He likewise suggests that “there should be greater cooperation and coordination between industry and higher education institutions ... especially concerning research and certain types of specialised training”. He suggests further that increasing donations and endowments be explored. It should be possible to get larger financial resources from an increasing number of affluent alumni. On the whole, the tone of his recommendations for the

financing of higher education in Singapore is subdued. Moreover, the relative affluence of Singapore would probably limit the applicability of his study in other less developed countries. Of this, RIHED must be aware.

The book adequately achieves its modest objectives and narrow focus but many readers might expect Dr Asher to undertake an expanded study to include not only institutional costs as he has done but also an analysis of private costs and broader social costs and benefits. Meanwhile, there is a need for other economists to undertake similar country-specific studies of the region.

AGUSTIN KINTANAR, JR.

*Institute of Southeast Asian Studies*

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*ASEAN Energy Issues, Proceedings of the Sixth Conference of the Federation of ASEAN Economic Associations, Bangkok, Thailand, 12-14 November 1981. Edited by Praipol Koomsup.* Bangkok: Thammasat University Press for the Thai Economic Society, 1984. Pp. 152.

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Each year the Economic Associations of the ASEAN countries meet in one of the member countries for a conference, generally with a thematic focus. In 1981 the Thai Economic Society hosted the Sixth Conference of the Federation of ASEAN Economic Associations to examine ASEAN energy issues. The papers and proceedings have now been published by the Thai Economic Society under the editorship of Praipol Koomsup.

There seems to be a common difficulty with the publications emanating from this kind of conference. Either one permits the revision of papers in the light of the discussions that have taken place and attempts to form the results into a coherent and comprehensive treatment of the subject in hand. This puts a great load in terms of responsibility and work on the shoulder of the editor and frequently leads to long delays before final publication results. The alternative is to