

The Comparative Education Society of Asia (CESA)

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The Comparative Education Society of Asia (CESA) was founded in Hong Kong in 1995. Its establishment resulted from initiatives among comparative educationists in Asia who had been considering the potential value of a regional body. Comparative education societies did exist in China, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, India and Taiwan, but other parts of the region had no society. The architects of CESA felt that a regional organisation was desirable, along the lines of the Comparative Education Society in Europe (CESE).

Two streams led to the formation of CESA. First, the Japan Comparative Education Society (JCES) established a special committee to work for the formation of the regional body. Yoshio Gondo, former President of the JCES, was appointed Chairperson of the committee, and Kengo Mochida of Kyushu University was appointed Secretary. As a part of committee's activity, in July 1994 the JCES organised a meeting with the Presidents of the Chinese Comparative Education Society (CCES) and the Korean Comparative Education Society (KCES), who gave active support to the idea of an Asian society.

The first major event leading to the establishment was the International Symposium on Development and Education in Asia, held in Fukuoka, Japan, in December 1994. The symposium was organised by members of the special committee and others from the JCES. Participants included Lee Byung-jin and Park Jun-hye from South Korea, Wang Chia-tung from Taiwan, Isahak Haron and Molly Lee from Malaysia, Mark Bray from Hong Kong, Mohammad Fakry Gaffar from Indonesia, Sumon Amornviat from Thailand, Sureshchandra Shukla from India, and Dao Trong-thi from Vietnam. The programme highlighted the vigorous economic and social development of parts of Asia, and the role attributed to education in this development. It added observations about the nature of comparative study of education. The programme included a special session to discuss the feasibility of establishing the Asian society. Zhou Nanzhao, then Vice-President of the CCES, could not attend the symposium because of a visa problem, but sent a message indicating that the CCES would strongly support the establishment of an Asian society.

The symposium was a great success. A founding committee for establishing

the Asian society was created, consisting mostly of invited scholars from overseas and three scholars from Japan. In the first meeting of the committee, Gondo was elected Chairperson and Mochida was elected Secretary.

Parallel to these initiatives was another stream of activity. A group named the Comparative Education Forum, consisting of scholars from China, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan and Malaysia had met in Prague in 1992 during the 8th World Congress of Comparative Education Societies. Some of these scholars subsequently met again in San Diego, USA and in Seoul, Korea, to discuss the feasibility of establishing an Asian society. Gondo, as the Chairperson of the special committee of the JCES, contacted this group, and both groups agreed to work jointly to found the Asian society. Thus, the work of the JCES special committee and that of the Forum merged to form a strong force for the establishment of CESA. The founding committee included members from both streams.

The founding committee held its second meeting in Hong Kong in 1995, in conjunction with the inaugural symposium of the Comparative Education Research Centre (CERC) at the University of Hong Kong. The committee agreed on a constitution, and CESA was officially founded on 30 May 1995. The following year CESA applied for membership of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES), and was admitted in 1997.

Goals and Characteristics

The goals of CESA proclaimed in its constitution are:

- to promote exchange and cooperation in comparative education research among educationists in Asia;
- to promote exchange and cooperation in teaching of comparative education in Asia;
- to promote mutual understanding and friendship among educationists in Asia; and
- to enhance international dialogue and exchange among scholars interested in Asia.

Thus, CESA aims to promote not only exchange and cooperation in comparative education research and teaching but also mutual understanding and friendship. CESA is open to the wider world, since it welcomes any scholar or student interested in education in Asia. Faced by the linguistic plurality of the region, CESA operates in English as the major international language acceptable to its members.

The constitution prescribed the major activities that CESA should perform. They include holding conferences, issuing lists of members, and publishing newsletters. Within this list, holding conferences has been CESA's main activity. At the start it was hoped that CESA could have its own journal, but due to financial constraints and other factors, this wish could not be realised.

CESA's initial constitution created a Board of Directors of not more than 22

members. The composition was intended to ensure geographically balanced representation, and the number reflected the places of residence of members in the founding committee. CESA adopted the term 'place of residence' instead of 'country', to allow for Hong Kong and Taiwan to be included as separate categories. Two members from each place of residence were elected directors. The Board of Directors was mandated to consider the revisions to the constitution, to consider the places and dates of conferences, to consider relationships with the WCCES, and to consider the admission of new members to CESA. In 2005 the places of residence represented in the Board of Directors were Japan, China, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and India. Asia is of course not confined to these locations, and it seemed desirable to widen the representation in the Board.

Although CESA is a regional society, the membership is not based on national societies since many countries in Asia have no national comparative education societies. Thus, membership is on an individual basis. The society does not have definite admission criteria. As noted above, any scholar or student who has interests in comparative education research and teaching can join CESA. As of August 2004, CESA had 262 members. Japan had the largest number of members, followed by Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong and Indonesia (Table 29.1). In addition to members from Asia were members from other parts of the world.

Table 29.1: CESA Number of Members by Places of Residence, 2004

<i>Place of Residence</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Place of Residence</i>	<i>Number</i>
Japan	138	Israel	2
Korea	21	Philippines	2
Taiwan	20	Singapore	2
Malaysia	13	Bangladesh	2
Thailand	13	Canada	2
Hong Kong	11	Egypt	1
Indonesia	10	France	1
USA	6	Italy	1
Vietnam	5	Macau	1
India	4	Mexico	1
China	3	UK	1
Germany	2	Total	262

CESA Conferences

Table 29.2 lists the conferences and their themes during CESA's initial decade. The first conference was held in Tokyo in 1996, and was followed by events in Beijing in 1998, Taipei in 2001, Bandung (Indonesia) in 2003, Bangi (Malaysia) in 2005, and Hong Kong, China in 2007. The last of these was a combined event with the annual conference of the Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong (CESHK). During this 2007 conference, Kengo Mochida was elected CESA President. The concern of the CESA leadership with the future of Asian education

in the 21st century was reflected in the conference themes. CESA conferences have been good forums for Asian scholars to discuss issues in education. Over 100 scholars and students took part in each conference. The 2003 conference attracted about 300 people thanks to efforts by the organising committee to encourage many Indonesian scholars to participate. This conference was particularly significant because it moved the venue to a location which did not have its own national or sub-national comparative education society. The outreach was maintained in 2005 with the conference in Malaysia.

Table 29.2: CESA Conferences, 1996-2007

	Year	Venue	Theme
1	1996	Waseda University (Tokyo, Japan)	Asian Perspectives in Education for the 21st Century
2	1998	Beijing Normal University (Beijing, China)	Modernization of Education vs. Cultural Traditions: Prospect of Asian Education in the 21st Century
3	2001	National Taiwan Normal University (Taipei, Taiwan)	The Prospects of Asian Education for the New Century
4	2003	Indonesia University of Education (Bandung, Indonesia)	Global Challenges and the Role of Education in Asia
5	2005	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (Bangi, Malaysia)	Education for World Peace: The Asian Context
6	2007	University of Hong Kong (China)	Learning from Each Other in an Asian Century

In the first four conferences, 322 presentations were made. Some characteristics can be discerned from analysis of the titles and abstracts. Among the topics chosen, higher education accounted for 18.9 per cent. Within this category, specific topics varied considerably, but study abroad, finance, massification, students' attitudes, information and communications technology, national/social development, gender, globalisation, and reforms were addressed by more than three presentations. The focus on higher education reflected major changes in this component of the systems of Asian countries.

Teachers were the focus of the next most prominent topic, accounting for 11.4 per cent of the total. Within this topic over half the presentations focused on teacher education and teacher training. A small number of presentations (5.9%) addressed theories and research in comparative education. This indicates that interest in this domain was not strong among scholars in Asia, who seem to have been more interested in educational problems and tasks.

Of the 322 presentations in the four conferences, 182 (56.5%) focused on single countries or locations (Table 29.3). This reflected the tendency of scholars to focus on their own places of residence. Studies addressing more than one country or location accounted for 47 (14.7%). Of these, 34 focused on two, six focused on three, and seven focused on four or more countries or locations. A small number of papers referred to regions, but comparison of regions was not very explicit in these studies.

Table 29.3: Papers in CESA Conferences, by Dimension of Comparisons

Geographic Focus of Comparison	No.	%	Geographic Focus of Comparison	No.	%
<i>Single country/location</i>	182	56.5	<i>Two countries/locations</i>	34	10.6
Taiwan	30		Japan, China	3	
Malaysia	26		Japan, Korea	3	
Indonesia	23		Japan, Thailand	3	
China	20		Japan, Indonesia	2	
Japan	19		Japan, Myanmar	1	
Korea	13		Japan, Russia	1	
Thailand	10		Japan, Vietnam	1	
India	7		Japan, USA	1	
Hong Kong	6		Japan, England	1	
Britain, England	5		China, Korea	1	
Vietnam	4		China, Hong Kong	1	
France	3		China, Singapore	1	
Philippines	3		Taiwan, China	2	
Bangladesh	2		Taiwan, USA	2	
Russia	2		Taiwan, England	1	
Singapore	2		Korea, Australia	1	
Sri Lanka	2		Hong Kong, Macau	1	
Bhutan	1		Hong Kong, Malaysia	1	
Australia	1		Hong Kong, Singapore	1	
Germany	1		Hong Kong, Taiwan	1	
Saudi Arabia	1		Malaysia, Brunei	1	
USA	1		Malaysia, Thailand	1	
			Papua New Guinea, Thailand	1	
<i>Three countries/locations</i>	6	1.9	Indonesia, Philippines	1	
Japan, Malaysia, USA	1		USA, Australia	1	
China, Germany, USA	1				
China, USA, Japan	1		<i>Four or more countries/locations</i>	7	2.2
Taiwan, China, Hong Kong	1		Hong Kong, Singapore, China, Taiwan	1	
Taiwan, China, Japan	1		China, Hong Kong, USA, Australia	1	
Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia	1		USA, Canada, Germany, Australia, Hong Kong	1	
			Britain, China, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, Sweden, USA	1	
			Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Sweden, USA, Japan, China	1	

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Table 29.3 (Continued):

Geographic Focus of Comparison	No.	%	Geographic Focus of Comparison	No.	%
			Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, China, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia	1	
			Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam	1	
<i>Regional</i>	18	5.6	<i>Not Specified</i>	75	23.2
Asia	5				
East Asia	3				
Southeast Asia	3				
South Asia	2				
Asia Pacific	2				
Asia-Europe	1				
Japan, Thailand, North America, Europe	1				
Latin America, Asia, Europe	1				
			Total	322	100.0

With the dominant focus of presentations on Asian countries, it can be argued that CESA was playing a global role of balancing the centre of gravity in comparative education research. However, detailed analysis of papers revealed some problems. Although several studies had a dimension of intra-national comparisons, many did not have any element of comparison. If scholars concentrate on their own countries without any element of comparison, it would be difficult to differentiate their studies from those of other fields of education. Therefore, it is desirable for Asian comparative educationists to try to base their studies on paradigms of comparative education research in order to improve the quality of their research.

Conclusions

The establishment of CESA was evidence that comparative education research in the region had developed enough to justify such a society. In the past, Asian scholars tended to look toward Europe and North America rather than to each other for dialogue and discussion.

CESA has achieved major accomplishments during its relatively short history, but also faces challenges. One challenge arises from diversity within the region. East Asia, particularly Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, has strong traditions of comparative education research and teaching. By contrast, the field is weaker in most other parts of the region. CESA has begun to reach out to Southeast Asia, but has not yet strongly penetrated west and north Asia. That, indeed, should be a mission for CESA in the coming years and decades. CESA

was established with founding members representing 11 different places of residence. Reflecting this representation, the constitution prescribes the number of directors as “not more than twenty-two ensuring geographically balanced representation”. During the first decade, only members from founding countries were elected directors. It is desirable to include directors from more locations to widen and promote activities. Another indication of the geographic imbalance is seen in geographic composition of the members. Table 29.1 shows that in 2004 Japanese members accounted for over half, and no other place of residence had more than 30 members. This partly reflected economic barriers and highlighted a need for attention.

Another challenge is to manage a regional society which holds great diversity in academic and other circumstances. A regional society like CESA requires special effort by office holders, particularly the President and Secretary General. CESA operates in English, but still needs to reach out to many language groups. Like many such societies, the potential is great but much depends on the enthusiasm and persistence of the leadership. The link with the WCCES is among the valued ways in which CESA collaborates with partner societies in the global community.