

**Barriers to Innovative School Practice: A Socio-Cultural Framework for  
Understanding Assessment Practices in Asia <sup>1</sup>**

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## **Introduction**

Lee (2001, p.10) identified a trend in Korea and Japan where assessment reform policies appeared to be moving towards “Diversification/Loosening” compared to England and the United States where assessment policies were characterized as moving towards “Unification/Tightening”. Lee (2000, p.11) described the different operational approaches to assessment reform:

...more uniform curriculum and high-stakes assessment with a focus on academic achievement were expected in England and the U.S., whereas more adaptive curricula and flexible assessments towards whole-person education were expected in Korea and Japan (Lee, 2001, p.11)

Lee’s analysis is only partially correct. While there is certainly a widespread curriculum reform agenda across the region, this paper will show that curriculum reform has not been accompanied by equally broad assessment reform. There are two key issues that shed light on why Lee’s initial analysis appears to have been somewhat premature.

The first issue is related to the increasing importance attached to participation in international large scale assessments such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) run by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and similar literacy, civics and science studies run by the International Association for Educational Evaluation and Assessment (IEA). Asian countries are usually well represented in these studies<sup>2</sup>. What is more, Asian students are often seen to perform very well. Yet on closer analysis, this performance is not uniform across the region. East Asian students – from Hong Kong, Korea, Japan and Taiwan, along with students from Singapore, are often ranked close to the top. Yet students from other South East Asian countries - Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia – often come near the bottom. Clearly, geography is not the key factor since Singapore students situated in South East Asia do very well. These regional disparities are not easy to explain. Thus one outcome of such international studies and their results is that assessment has remained centre-stage across most of the region although, it is not the kind of assessment referred to by Lee (2001). It seems important

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<sup>2</sup> The IEA Civic Education Study was an exception with Hong Kong being the only Asian society represented.

to understand assessment reforms in this broader context of increased emphasis on large scale assessment.

A second issue relates to the purposes of assessment and the cultural contexts in which they are embedded. Biggs (1996) has argued that the focus on examinations in the so called “Confucian heritage cultures” (CHC)<sup>3</sup> is a distinctive feature that has impacted on student learning. By extrapolation, it might also be argued that the kind of learning that has habituated CHC students to examinations may also assist them to do well in large scale international assessments. This cultural argument has not been uncontested (Morrison, 2006) but the issue remains that certain forms of assessment such as examinations have been privileged in some Asian countries in ways that they are not many western countries. Yet this argument does not directly address the issue of regional disparities because examinations are as prevalent in South East Asia as they are in East Asia. Nevertheless, for whatever reasons, examinations remain an important part of assessment cultures in many Asian countries and their influence needs to be taken into consideration when assessment reforms are discussed.

The issues outlined above provide a rich yet complex backdrop against which to examine assessment policy and practices in Hong Kong schools. The purpose for discussing them here is to locate teacher action and practice in broader socio-cultural contexts that help to construct that practice. The purposes of this paper, therefore, are to:

- Provide a backdrop for understanding Hong Kong teachers’ responses to assessment reforms;
- Identify the distinctive characteristics of assessment across the Asian region and seek to account for this distinctiveness; and
- Explore the cultural contexts of assessment in the region and identify the way such contexts facilitate or restrict assessment practices.

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<sup>3</sup> CHC cultures include broadly Korea, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore (although in the latter there are also representatives of other cultures).

## **The Purposes of Assessment – Selection or Learning?**

### *Assessment for Selection*

Public examinations remain a topic of community interest and concern in many Asian countries. The reasons for this interest vary. It might be the 15,000 students in Bangladesh who were expelled for cheating in the 2001 public examination (Lawson, 2001, 13 May), the threat to stability and cohesion now said to be posed by the competitive college entrance examinations in China (Hartman, 2006, 21 December) or the extensive public consultations that were undertaken in Hong Kong in 2005 when the government decided to do away with both the Hong Kong Certificate of Education (Form 5) and “A” levels (Form 7) and introduce a single public examination at the end of Form 6 (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2005). Examinations attract this public attention because they are part of the social structure of many Asian societies providing the main pathway to further study in elite institutions such as prestigious secondary schools or universities. It has been pointed out that “the first written public examinations were introduced over 2000 thousand years ago, in China, to select the most able citizens for positions in the civil service and to reduce the effects of patronage” (The World Bank, 2001). This historic function of public examinations is now widespread although the destinations of successful examinees are now more diverse. It is in this sense that public examinations are seen as a selection mechanism screening out some students and endorsing others for further education. This process of selection does not operate in a vacuum, despite the continuing belief in public examinations as an objective selection mechanism. Examination systems create their own distinctive social practices that become part of the competition associated with limited places in elite institutions and the almost unlimited demand for them. Discussed below is the most noticeable of these practices and certainly the most well documented.

Known as “juku” in Japan, “buxiban” in Taiwan, “hagwon” in Korea and “tutorial school” in Hong Kong, “tutorials” in India - Bray and Kwok (2003, p.611) have conceptualized the activities of these ‘cram schools’ under the broader more positive practice of “private supplementary teaching” since not all private tutoring

arrangements take place in dedicated tutorial centres. Kwok (2004a, p. 64) has also pointed to the negative connotations of “cramming” in the sense “that it is related to rote learning”. The broader term is preferable in describing the breadth of activities in which students engage outside the formal schooling system. Nevertheless, the negative aspects of “cramming” for examinations cannot be dismissed “because a major purpose of tutoring is to help pupils to gain qualifications, demand tends to increase close to the major public examinations, and then abruptly to decline once the examinations are over” (Bray & Kwok, 2003, p.614). “Cram schools” private tutoring and public examinations are, therefore, inextricably linked.

There are significant pedagogical implications that flow from this link. Kwok (2004a, p.71) has referred to the “idol” tutors who “delineated piecemeal educational processes and outcomes, entirely determined by open examination results. Their marketing styles and pedagogical characteristics reinforced open examination pressure and encouraged students to value the importance of open examinations to their life/career”. From the point of view of students themselves, cram schools provided “shortcuts to learning, thorough past examination paper analysis, and even seemingly reliable open examination tips in Hong Kong, Taipei and Tokyo (Kwok, 2004a, p.70). Foondun has also reported in the South East Asian context the negative aspects of what he refers to as “private tutoring” that results in an:

emphasis is on specific examination skills... (and)... inordinate cramming and learning by heart lengthy lists of verbs, comparatives, masculine and feminine, singulars and plurals etc ... But there is worse. In one examination, examiners found 40 scripts of 40 pupils identical. The teacher admitted that “he had prepared about 100 possible questions and made his pupils learn the answers to them by heart (Foondun, 2002, p.505)

Given the negative impact of cram school and private tutoring activities, why do they persist? As Foondun (2002, p.503) has noted, it is not that governments are unaware of either the purpose or function of such extra-classroom activities. Yet whether it is in Singapore, Korea, Indonesia or Myanmar, attempts at control have been largely unsuccessful. In the terms of Kim and Lee (2002, p. 2), cram schools are “perfect substitutes” for public schools and therefore at least as important to the community which provides direct support for them.

The reasons for such support are multiple. Kim and Lee (2002, p.25), with specific reference to the Korean context, point to government policies themselves:

The theory and empirical evidence provided in this paper strongly suggest that rampant private tutoring is a market response to the under provision of public education and the heavy regulation and strict controls of the government. It is predicted by our model and confirmed by our empirical finding that students with high academic ability, high family income, and whose parents are highly educated, spend more on private tutoring because their educational demands are not properly met by the formal school system that is provided by the government.

Foondun (2002, p. 491) agrees that it is the element of competition in the education system that gives private tutoring its edge as families seek to gain a relative advantage for their children “in the education race”, whether it is at primary or secondary level. While ever there is a prize at the end of the race – whether it is entry to an elite secondary school or university, then competition becomes the dominating force that guides the behaviour of parents. Kwok (2004b, p. 8), with special reference to Hong Kong, has argued that modernization, economic growth and technological advancement provided “the ultimate causative forces” influencing the availability of private tutoring in a meritocratic society where “education was the major screening device for upward social mobility”. Herein lays the real outcome of the “race”: cross-generational social and economic gain. It is this for which parents are willing to pay and for which so many students suffer what the Koreans call, “*ipsi-jiok* ... entrance examination hell” (Kim & Lee, 2002, p.4).

While Kwok (2004b, pp. 10-11) has highlighted the social and economic contexts in which cram schools and private tutoring seem to thrive, he has also referred to the broader cultural contexts of Confucian heritage societies as a factor that helps to explain why it is that success in examinations is so important. He makes the very interesting point that while such an explanation is widespread, he does not believe that there is sufficient evidence to support it at this stage. Other writers, however, have been less reticent to attribute cultural factors as causes of parental commitment to examination success. Gray (2001), in his review of Zeng (1999), makes the point that “the test is not viewed primarily as an aptitude or I.Q. test, as in the West; rather, what is being measured is how well trained a student is. In other words, what is valued is

not the ability to acquire information, to efficiently learn new things, and make connections between them, but the personal qualities--discipline, obedience, 'spirit,' a good memory, the ability to postpone gratification--of the individual who can successfully pass the test". These are Confucian virtues that both Gray (2001) and Zeng (1999) see as operating principles in modern Confucian heritage cultures.

Nguyen, Cees and Pilot (2005, p.407) have summarised a range of literature supporting the idea that cultural factors do play a significant role in different aspects of teaching and learning for students in Confucian heritage cultures. This is an issue that will be returned to in the third section of this paper. Yet as Kwok (2004b, p.10) has pointed out, cram schools and private tutoring are also features of many non-Confucian heritage societies in which case the 'cultural' argument becomes less persuasive. Even in a mainly Confucian heritage culture like Singapore, it has been argued that the examination system is not so much a relic of Confucianism as a sorting device to ensure racial equality and harmony (Moore, 2000). It is this meritocratic aspect of the exam system that maybe generalizable across Asian cultures, even if it is most deeply embedded in Confucian heritage culture countries. Meritocracy implies competition for limited opportunities and it is this competition that seems to encourage parents to seek whatever means they can to assist their children to do well.

### **The role of large scale assessments in assessment reform policy**

Kellaghan and Greaney (2001, p.87) have commented that "the most remarkable development in assessment towards the end of the 20th century has probably been the growth in its use to measure the achievement outcomes of national systems of education, either considered uniquely (in national assessments) or in the context of the performance of other education systems (in international comparative studies of achievement)". While examinations and national and international assessments can broadly be grouped together as "modes of assessment", there are nevertheless, a number of significant differences between them including purposes, focus and uses.

The World Bank (2001), for example, has identified differences of purpose and focus. Examinations provide information on individuals whereas national assessments

usually provide information on entire education systems. The purpose of providing information on individuals is to facilitate selection processes whereas the purpose of system wide data is to monitor general education levels as well as making a general assessment about the “health” of the system as a whole. Kellaghan and Greaney (2003, pp.10-12) have pointed out in the African context that examinations are not good tools for enhancing the quality of an education system, but indeed may do the opposite. Powdyel (2005, p.47), on the other hand, has argued that in Bhutan examinations have served this system level function. Yet both are agreed, that the specific role of national assessments is that they can be directed at system level issues thus enabling policymakers to address concerns about the education system.

While examinations are pervasive across Asia, national assessments, in the sense mentioned above, are not. (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2001, p.91). Thailand has included national assessments focussed on the quality of individual schools as part of its education reforms (The World Bank, 2006, p.66) as has Hong Kong with its Basic Competency Assessment (Curriculum Development Council, 2001, p.81). Under the influence of The World Bank, Vietnam, Cambodia and Bhutan have also embarked on the development of national assessments as tools for monitoring the quality of their education systems (Griffin & Thanh, 2006; The World Bank, 2007; Powdyel, 2005). In addition, a number of Asian countries has taken very deliberate decisions to participate in international large scale assessments such as the Program on International Student Assessment (PISA), and the various international assessments conducted by the International Association for the Assessment of Educational Achievement (IEA) in areas such a mathematics, science, reading, civic education and information and communications technology. The outcomes of these international studies have provided some interesting and keenly debated results. They have also raised important issues about the nature and purpose of student assessment.

In terms of results, it is the dominance of students from East Asian countries that is a hallmark of these assessments. The outcomes of the *Trends in Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS) consistently ranked students from Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan and Korea as the top performers. In Grade 4 Mathematics, students from Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and Taiwan were the top four performers out of twenty five countries (Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez, & Chrostowski, 2004, p.31) In



Science, it was the same four countries, although with a different order: Singapore, Taiwan, Japan and Hong Kong. Yet such results were not Asia wide: students from the Philippines ranked 23/25 in both Mathematics and Science (Martin, Mullis, Gonzalez, & Chrostowski, 2004, p.37) In Grade 8 Mathematics students from five Asian countries were ranked in the top five (Singapore, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan) with Malaysia at 10, Indonesia at 34 and the Philippines at 41 (Mullis et al., 2004, p.38) In Science, students from Singapore, Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong and Japan were ranked 1-4 and 6 respectively. Malaysia was ranked 20, Indonesia 36 and Philippines 42 (Martin et al., 2004, p.41) The TIMSS' assessment is curriculum related, but there is also evidence from the more skills related PISA assessments that Asian students also do very well.

In mathematical literacy for example, Hong Kong's fifteen year olds outperformed all students from both OECD and non-OECD countries. Korean, Japanese and Macau students also did very well, coming within the top ten countries. Yet, as with TIMSS, students from countries such as Thailand and Indonesia were ranked towards the bottom of the participating countries (OECD, 2004a, p.94). The results for problem – solving were much the same. Korea, Hong Kong, Japan and Macau ranked 1, aeq. 2, 4 and 6 respectively. Again Thailand and Indonesia ranked towards the bottom (OECD, 2004b, p. 42) For science literacy, the story is similar with some variation in the positions taken by the East Asian countries, but the same gap between East and South East Asian countries(OECD, 2004a, p.294). These results from both TIMSS and PISA raise a number of issues.

With international studies such as these, there seems little reason for the participating countries to run national assessments of their own. In an important sense, large scale internal assessments can take the place of national assessments, pointing as they do to strengths and weaknesses in the performance of students. The international context adds to the weight of such assessments because governments can get some sense of where their education systems stand vis à vis their international economic competitors. Whether this is a valid educational reason for such assessments is another question, but it is certainly a reason that has some currency with governments in the region. Of course, the news is not good for all such governments so that in

countries like the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia these results give caused some soul searching.

Of course, the results presented above are very basic and there are much more sophisticated analyses that seek to explain the pattern of results (for example, Chui & Ho, 2006). In East Asian countries, however, these results coincide with the widespread education reforms that have been the focus of much of this book. On the one hand, radical change is being proposed to the school curriculum and in some jurisdictions (e.g. Taiwan and Hong Kong) the examination system. Yet the results of international assessments seem to suggest that current arrangements for curriculum and assessment are capable of producing outstanding comparative results. Yet the status quo in many East Asian classrooms has been highlighted by Leung (2001, p35) as “content oriented...examination driven...teaching is very traditional and old fashioned”. It is this tension between tradition and results that characterise much of the debate about the performance of East Asian students in international assessments and in some instances draws into question the rationale for current educational reforms.

There has been a considerable amount of literature attempting to account for the way the traditional curriculum, teaching and assessment methods that characterize East Asian classrooms lead to superior student performance. Biggs (1996) and Marton, Alba and Tse (1996) argued that part of the explanation related to learning styles. What many western observers thought was rote learning these scholars identified as memorisation that led to deep understanding. Ironically, an assessment strategy such as an examination had the potential to reward memorisation so that there was a clear link between assessment and learning. Leung (2001) has pointed to both the conception of teachers in East Asian societies and the focus on their scholarly as distinct from pedagogical role. He has argued that culturally teachers in East Asia are more concerned with the class as a whole than with individuals so that the care of a large group of students is not overly problematic. When this is coupled with the deep subject matter knowledge of teachers then the context is one in which knowledgeable teachers take on the responsibility to ensure that their students are equally knowledgeable. The high regard in which teachers are held facilitates this process and creates a learning context that values knowledge acquisition. For Leung, these are

deeply cultural issues reflective of what are now popularly called “Confucian heritage cultures”. Thus the explanation advanced for the dominance of East Asian students in international assessments is largely a cultural one. It is an argument that has been examined in some depth by Kennedy and Lee (in press) but further attention cannot be devoted to it here.

***Assessment for Learning: Alternative Approaches to Assessment and their Impact in the Asian Region***

Public examinations systems and large scale assessments can be characterised as promoting “assessment *of* learning” rather than “assessment *for* learning” (Assessment Reform Group, 1999). Such a distinction is an important one in educational terms. Assessment *of* learning is a summative process that seeks to find out what students know at a particular point in time – at the end of a unit of work or a key stage of schooling. It is a measure or judgment about what learning has taken place. This is what public examinations and large scale assessments do: measure what students know so that they can be ranked from most knowledgeable to least knowledgeable. Assessment *for* learning, on the other hand, is any form of assessment that provides feedback to students on the progress they are making in their learning. It can take many forms ranging from questions asked by a classroom teacher, to classroom tests and checklists that students themselves can use to check their own learning progress. The purpose of such assessment is to improve learning and move students from where they are to where they need to be. It does not compare students in any way – its purpose is to assist students to improve their learning. This approach to assessment has gained in popularity in many Western countries in recent times. The importance of this trend was best demonstrated when the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) declared that “teachers using formative assessment approaches guide students toward development of their own learning to learn” skills that are increasingly necessary as knowledge is quickly outdated in the information society” (OECD, 2005, p.22)

Whether such an approach is called “assessment for learning” or “formative assessment”, what is clear is that such approaches seek to make assessment a more relevant and meaningful process for students. It stands in contrast to the structural

rigidity represented by public examination systems and large scale assessments across the region. Yet, unlike in the West, there is not a widespread movement across the Asian region to promote and adopt these classroom based forms of assessment. Nevertheless, the examples that do that are worth noting. An external evaluation of Thailand's current approaches to assessment articulated a rationale for adopting new forms of assessment that could well be applicable across the region (Office of Commercial Services [Queensland University of Technology], 2002, p.28):

The current understanding of assessment models and procedures used in Thailand rewards conformity, memorisation, recall and knowledge reproduction. Teachers need a significant amount of training and guidance in new and alternative methods of assessment.

This view was supported within Thailand when the Secretary-General of the Office of the National Education Commission proclaimed publicly that (Kaewdang, 1999).

.... assessment is the key factor that can affect the learning behavior. Without the reform of assessment, it is rather difficult to reform learning. In order to expand the scope of evaluation and assessment beyond the multiple-choice type of tests, Section 26 [i.e. of the National Education Act, 1999 ] states that educational institutions shall assess learners' performance through observation of their development; personal conduct; learning behavior; participation in activities and results of the tests accompanying the teaching-learning process commensurate with the different levels and types of education.

Thailand's emphasis on more classroom based assessments of learning is related to its current educational reform agenda. Thus there is little indication of how successful these attempts will be.

Hong Kong, on the other hand, has had a relatively long history of attempting to introduce new forms of assessment (Yu, Kennedy, Fok & Chan 2006). The current reform agenda in Hong Kong is no exception but there seems little reason to believe that it will be any more successful than previous attempts (Fok, Kennedy, Chan & Yu 2006). Carless (2005, p.51) has shown how difficult assessment reform is in Hong Kong and proposed a somewhat complex framework to try and account for Hong Kong teachers' resistance to such reforms. It includes micro level factors such as personal beliefs and values as well as macro level factors such as the existence of high

stakes examinations. Assessment reform, at least in Hong Kong, does not appear to be an easy task.

Hong Kong and Thailand are not alone in their attempts to introduce new forms of assessment into their education systems. There is also evidence of similar reform in countries like China (Gu & Berry, in press; Gao, 2005; Han, 2006), Philippines (Department of Education [Philippines], 2004) and Singapore (Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (2006); Sellan, Chong, & Tay 2006; Fan & Quek, 2005). Yet such reform agendas in no way challenge the public examination systems in these countries. Perhaps more importantly, such attempts at innovation differ in form from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and across the region there is no agreed definition of these classroom based assessments. Table 1 shows different approaches to classroom based assessments being used in different countries.

**Table 1: Exemplars of Classroom Based Assessments in Selected Asian Countries**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Example of Classroom Assessment</b>
China	Gu and Berry (in press) Gao (2005)  Yan (2006)	Oral assessment Assessment Saloon: A Developing Technique for Student Assessment  Cambridge Young Learners Test
Malaysia	Lim and Zhao (2005)	“Mathematics assessments are usually given in the form of formative tests such as short tests or monthly tests”
Indonesia	SEAMEO Secretariat (1998)	“Continuous (formative) student assessment is practiced widely and is the responsibility of each school. There are several types of formative assessment, i.e., monthly mid-term and final term examination. The results of the formative assessment would affect the result of the final term exam, the summative assessment”
Philippines	Department of Education	“Assessment for Learning:

	[Philippines] (2004)	Practices, Tools and Alternative Approaches”
Singapore	Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (2006) Sellan, Chong, and Tay(2006) Fan & <u>Quek</u> (2005)	“Formative Assessment Strategies” Project work Integrating New Assessment Strategies Into Mathematics Classrooms: What have we learned from a CRPP Mathematics assessment project?

There are a number of points to make about Table 1. Apart from China, there is no evidence in any of these countries that assessment reform is part of a broader reform agenda. The China examples, however, appear to be forms of assessment that are outside the mainstream – additional to the examinations that remain the real high stakes events for students. The Singapore example of Project Work is somewhat different. Project Work is a compulsory GSE A Level subject and the nature of the subject requires new approaches to assessment. The real reform is in the nature of the subject; new approaches to assessment simply follow. The Mathematics example in Singapore is part of a research project and does not appear to be systemic. Similarly in the Philippines, where what is on offer is a single set of teacher inservice activities focused on assessment for learning and seemingly outside of any broader assessment reform process. What SEAMEO refers to, however, under the guise of “formative” assessment, is really a regime of testing geared to preparing students for the final examination. Thus apart from the assessment policy directions referred to earlier in Hong Kong and Thailand, there is no coherent approach to assessment reform in the region. As Table 1 shows, attempts at changing assessment practices or highlighting alternative practices across the region are fragmented and piecemeal

Examinations continue to reign supreme as the dominant mode of assessment in the Asian region. This suggests that the so called “international transfer of assessment” (Sebatane, 2000) has been limited to large scale assessments but not to classroom based assessments. Yet it can be detected in other forms of assessment. The dominant assessment cultures in the region are summative rather than formative, competitive rather than learning oriented and increasingly used by governments to measure national educational progress. Together, the importance attached to

examinations and large scale assessments do not seem to provide any incentive for innovative classroom based assessment practices.

## **Conclusion**

Western assessment literature suggests the possibility of broad changes in assessment practices focussed on student learning and encapsulated in the slogan “assessment for learning”. Yet such an approach to assessment is not characteristic of much of Asia, with notable policy exceptions in Hong Kong and Thailand. Examinations remain a key assessment strategy across countries. The importance of examinations is reinforced not for any genuine educational rationale but for social reasons concerned with the allocation of limited places for much sought after secondary schools and universities. Even in Hong Kong where there has been considerable support for alternative methods of assessment, the newly designed terminal school examination will still allocate the same limited number of university places. This high stakes social function of assessment gives it a role and function that can trivialize other modes of assessment. The potential for assessment reform in this context may well be limited.

International large scale assessments have not challenged the role of examinations but rather may well have reinforced them, at least in East Asia. Students from East Asian countries tend to outperform not only their peers in the West but also in other parts of Asia. Research has suggested that the reasons for this are largely cultural. Yet perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this paper, the strategies used for success in examinations - memorisation for the purpose of deep understanding and teacher dominated classroom that involves deep caring for the whole class – are also the ones that account for success in international large scale assessments. This culturalist argument has been questioned by Kennedy and Lee (in press) since it has the potential to stereotype of East Asian students and at the same time misrepresent the values of students in South-East Asia who do not do as well as their East Asian peers. Yet the point to note here is that in many parts of the region the results of international large scale assessments do not suggest the need for different approaches to assessment.

As far as alternative approaches to assessment are concerned the Asian region faces two problems. First, in most countries there is no systematic reform agenda for assessment to accompany curriculum reforms: conservative approaches to assessment

have been retained to meet the needs of new curriculum designed to produce creative, innovative and problem solving students. Second, in those countries where policy change advocating assessment reform have been advocated, examinations still play an important social function that is difficult to ignore. Assessment reform, therefore, remains a distant goal across the region. At this point in time it is difficult to see how it can be given greater priority since it would involve confronting significant social and cultural issues that are deeply embedded in many societies across the region.



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