

**CSIS 2019**  
**11<sup>th</sup> International Scientific and Theoretical Conference “Communicative  
Strategies of Information Society”**

**THE SOCIOCULTURAL FUNCTION OF UNIVERSITIES IN THE  
REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

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***Abstract***

The purpose of the article is to study the sociocultural function of the university through an example of the Republic of Korea as one of East Asia's most developed countries. The article considers the university as a social institution, acting as a link between science, culture and some areas of professional activity in the context of globalization. The methodology is based on a sociocultural approach. The sociocultural functions of the university and its significance in the context of globalization are revealed. The article considers the problem of comprehension of the changes taking place in a modern university, understanding the possibility of a new type of university focused on technology transfer and entrepreneurial activity, the university that implements a sociocultural function and can preserve the humanistic values that exist in society. One of the countries that was able to maintain a system of principles and priorities was the Republic of Korea. Over the past few decades, the Republic of Korea has made a giant leap in the development of higher education. The authors focus on the integration of Western and traditional cultural values and the preservation of the education cultural heritage in the Republic of Korea. In summary, the authors conclude that it is possible to establish a balance between East Asian and Western ideas of the university with the example of universities in the Republic of Korea.

2357-1330 © 2020 Published by European Publisher.

**Keywords:** Higher education, sociocultural function of university, globalization, entrepreneurial university, world-class university.



## **1. Introduction**

University education is a sociocultural phenomenon that provides the technological, economic, cultural development of society and builds the intellectual capacity of an individual. Education promotes both the development of not just the professional qualities of an individual in the face of rapid economic and political changes in the world but also the creativity growth, which helps to implement one's role in society and instill social responsibility. Thus, the university education system is designed not only at adapting an individual to constantly changing living standards but also at developing a proactive attitude to life. Transforming in response to the challenges of our time, the university becomes a social institution that builds up the creativity of the subject, providing the technical, economic and sociocultural dynamics.

From the very beginning, university as a social institution has been serving as a link between various fields of professional activity, science, and culture. As a result of the active development of globalization processes, the role of the university's functions is gradually increasing, and the university itself becomes the centre of the formation of the sociocultural environment. Social and cultural function as one of the crucial functions of the university is acquiring a special significance in the modern world. It forms a student's values, norms of behaviour, moral qualities of an individual, sense of patriotism and mindset. Possessing this quality makes it possible for a student to become "a cultured human". In the modern world where global changes are taking place in the political, economic and social spheres, a highly cultured specialist is a necessity. The sociocultural function serves as the bedrock of the professional experience of a future specialist and determines his role and place in society.

## **2. Problem Statement**

A university is a place where cultural values consolidate, interaction with other social institutions happen and certain attitudes and preferences of the individuals establish. If we imagine culture as the knowledge of expertise and the ability to be guided by it while choosing the behaviour pattern, based on the moral principles of the value of human life and the coexistence of creative personalities, then the university acts as an institute that sets the standards of a humanistic attitude to reality. The problem of the article is to comprehend the changes taking place in a modern university, to understand whether a new type of university focused on technology transfer and business activities can implement a social and cultural function and help to preserve the humanistic values of society.

## **3. Research Questions**

### **3.1. Transformation of sociocultural mission of the modern university**

According to the authors of the article, changes in social and cultural reality lead to the transformation of the university that becomes an inevitable phenomenon. The function of the university, which is to socialize the personality, transfer and preserve cultural traditions, is gradually changing. This feature has given way to innovation, which in turn creates uncertainty in the development of society. The authors of the article consider the sociocultural function that is implemented within the concept of an entrepreneurial university.

### **3.2.Modernization experience of the higher education system in East Asian countries**

Nowadays the trend of universities to be the center of national culture in those countries that continue the historical tradition aimed at meeting the needs of society and humanity is noted. East Asian countries build their higher education system based on national principles.

### **3.3.The implementation of the western higher education system in the universities of the Republic of Korea**

Republic of Korea is one of the countries in the world that is rapidly developing innovations and technologies. Higher education in the Republic of Korea has made a huge leap over the past decades. The authors consider the possibility of preserving national traditions in the system of higher education despite the western model implementation of the university.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the research is to consider the sociocultural function of universities in the Republic of Korea.

## **5. Research Methods**

As a research methodology, the authors rely on a sociocultural approach where society is seen as a system. In the system, the university acts as a social institution that functionally connects the external environment, and they interact with each other as systems controlled by the values of this society.

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1.Transformation of sociocultural mission of modern university**

Historically, the university has been a cultural centre, a place of cultural heritage transfer. The university as a social institution has the status both of knowledge and culture centre and a product of its time which is influenced by changes in social and cultural reality; as a result, the transformation of the university becomes an inevitable phenomenon (Zinevich & Balmasova, 2018).

The university mission initially was to transcend and improve culture, sociality and personality in intellectual, aesthetic and ethical respects (Ortega y Gasset, 2000). This was the function of the classical university. At the same time, the university aimed to educate and progress society, as a result of which it was necessary to prepare a professional, a person who knows and holding information for the successful development of society.

One of the essential features of a modern university is not only the training of professionals but also a cultured person (Ortega y Gasset, 2000). A feature of the modern university is a gradual departure from general guidelines meaning a distance from the traditions, sustainability, and patterns inherent in a classical university. The existence of the culture transcending feature typically found in a classical university is being called into question at present. This feature has given way to innovation, which in turn creates uncertainty in the development of society and brings each nation into a "space of flows" (Castells, 2010). As a result, the university is forced to take a global form of existence under which scientific

research is the basis. This makes it possible for a modern university to become global. The transformation of knowledge into information inherent in post-industrial society is the basis for creating a world-class university.

The knowledge transformation to information inherent in the post-industrial society is the foundation for creating a world-class university, which is relevant at present (Emelyanova & Volosnikova, 2018). According to the concept of a world-class university created in the context of globalization, the main aspects are "high talent concentration", "resources abundance" and "an effective management system". At the same time, the university becomes an entity where a high percentage of talented students, qualified lecturers and specialists from other well-known universities of the world are concentrated. The reason for the success of a world-class university is its management structure; thanks to it universities gain independence from the government, the ability to carry out the educational process on their own, not adhering to certain imposed standards, and create an environment to form critical thinking, innovation, and creativity (Golovko, Zinevich, & Ruzankina, 2018).

In modern society, the close interaction of universities, government, and business plays a crucial role in innovative development. One of the main ideas regarding the transformation of a university that can cope with the problems of higher education associated with the transition to a "knowledge society" was the concept of an entrepreneurial university (Emelyanova & Volosnikova, 2018). The University of Entrepreneurship is a modern phenomenon, implemented by the academic community as a new production method, based on a constant influx of organizational and technological innovations. A new type of university implies an entrepreneurial behavior, and the concept of this university is technocratic. If we consider the sociocultural function, then two points of view are distinguished. On the one hand, the university loses the feature of culture transferring, and profit becomes the value. The university turns into a business organization aimed to promote its products on the market. The cultural dimension of the university in modern society is not paramount, and values are gradually changing (Bodunkova & Hyornaya, 2002). In this case, the university as a social institution loses its former status and becomes a facility for the reproduction of specialists profitable to the market. On the other hand, the entrepreneurial function of the university can be implemented without harming the traditional university values and principles laid down by the classic university (Clark, 1999).

## **6.2. Modernization experience of the higher education system in East Asian countries**

Until now, there is no precise understanding of what a university should be and what idea it is obliged to implement. Globalization makes corrections to the comprehension of the university role and its features (Zinevich & Balmasova, 2019). Some researchers claim a crisis of university in the Western world and the destruction of traditional ideas that have existed for several centuries. However, it is worth noting the trend of universities to be the centre of national culture in those countries that continue the historical tradition aimed at meeting the needs of society and humanity (Kang, 2015). The university's involvement in the social and cultural life of society is still significant; the university is still an impetus for further national development, it contributes to the formation of social responsibility among students and puts cultural exchanges in priority. The university's mission is to educate the young generation, adhering to national values (Emelyanova & Volosnikova, 2018). Many countries are moving in this

direction, but it is worth to have a look at those that have made a sharp increase in the development of education in a short period, paying considerable attention to the social and cultural functions of the university, which exist inextricably with the traditions of society (Lunev, 2016).

One of the major countries with the fastest-growing economy and education are China, Japan, Singapore, the Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Despite the strong influence of the West to the globalization process, these countries differ in that they do not just follow European traditions and copy the Western model but build their system based on national traditions and principles (Rasem, 2007). Globalization that has affected countries worldwide speak of the process as westernization determining the development direction of these countries is considered. Both political and economic globalization cannot exist outside the cultural context. The influence of this process is reflected in national identity leading to the cultural unification and declining the opportunity to progress in one's way (Rasem, 2007). In this regard, some Eastern countries have chosen a different development path in economic and socio-political life. There is an increase in traditionalism and patriotism in these countries, which does not prevent them from successfully integrating into global markets. It is worth noting the role of the state in the Eastern countries is much higher than in the United States and Western countries; the national economy is developing with a share of public-private partnerships. Also, there is no real control of internal processes and mechanisms of political pressure from the West in these countries. The Western concept of globalization is not widespread in the East. These countries are distinguished by originality and independence that helps them determine the development direction. The identity issue for the Eastern countries is particularly relevant. These countries are distinguished by their originality and independence, which help them determine the development direction. The identity issue for the Eastern countries is particularly relevant.

It is worth saying that despite an attempt to follow its course, the Eastern countries' success was also affected by modernization resulting in the opportunity to integrate the experience of Western countries into the national culture. These countries managed to maintain a system of principles, and priorities and cultural synthesis triggered the formation of new ideas and perspectives. Borrowing the models of Western countries, traditions that are the basis for the stability of society remain a priority in the East. In combination with the development of innovations, the development path of the Eastern countries is making progress both in the economic and educational spheres.

On the one hand, the process of introducing a Western model of education into Eastern society with traditional values has led to radical changes. The legal system was upgraded; that allowed to create appropriate institutions and personnel. The countries have begun creating special programs to update education in general (Lee, 1999). On the other hand, education in these countries has deeply rooted cultural traditions and does not develop in isolation from them. These countries of Southeast Asia are called post-Confucian (or modern Confucian) and focus on the harmonization of traditions and modernity in society.

This model of education with traditional values and the development of science and economy is distinguished by an increase in the number of people with a degree, scientific, technological, engineering and mathematical achievements, rapid innovative development as well as the growth of research and world-class universities (Kang, 2015). According to statistics, the third part of all global R&D

investments are made in post-Confucian countries; many Asian universities such as the National University of Singapore, The University of Hong Kong, The University of Tokyo, Seoul National University and others have high rankings due to the successful upgrade and the ability to mix traditional management system and borrowed models of university structure.

### **6.3.The implementation of the western higher education system in the universities of the Republic of Korea**

One of the countries that was able to maintain a system of principles and priorities was the Republic of Korea. Over the past few decades, the Republic of Korea has made a giant leap in the development of higher education. Currently, the Republic of Korea is considered one of the innovative countries in the world. The rapid development of innovations and technologies based on higher education institutions is carried out at the expense of state support (Lee, 2002). It's related to that Korean higher education followed the model of post-Confucian systems, distinguished by strong public administration and control over the higher education development as well as the individuals' commitment to self-improvement through training. A high share of university education costs is a significant characteristic of the economies of highly developed countries. The Korean government has chosen a “careful selection” strategy to manage the budget in favour of top-performing universities. The implementation of the western system had specific objectives; educational reforms were aimed at overcoming the deficiencies of the cultural heritage in education. It was supposed to soften the strictness of state exams, upgrade the system that impedes innovation and creativity and increase the competitiveness of professionals in the world market. There has been a significant increase in resources and the environment in the education sector. Therein lies a deviation from traditions of the East Asian educational practices. Regardless of the state control policy, there has been made progress in the autonomy of universities, and it also has grown significantly.

Despite the Western model implementation, elements of the country own culture have been preserved in the education field. First of all, education for Koreans is one of the important and sometimes the only possible way to climb the social ladder and secure a prosperous future. For parents, giving higher education for their child is a priority life goal, and they are ready to invest all their savings and salaries in his/her education. Parents are primarily considering entering one of the three most prestigious universities in the Republic of Korea; that can open the doors for graduates to a successful future. According to statistics, more than 80% of students go to universities after graduating from high school. Thus, Koreans see higher education at the university as the key to social mobility; that differs from the culture of Western countries, where education is increasingly necessary for the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

An important aspect that is deeply rooted in the traditional culture of Korea is the desire for knowledge and a deep belief in ongoing development throughout life. This emphasis on learning depends increasingly on the centuries-old Confucian belief that an individual achieves perfection through education and that only the most educated should govern the country and society. Even in the modern era, educational achievements are accepted as the fairest measure of human dignity. Korean students are highly motivated by a strong desire to improve their social and economic status, uphold family honour, gain admiration from their teachers and parents, achieve self-fulfilment and get a good job. It is also worth underlining that there is careful parental control over children's performance. Many studies have

shown the importance of parental involvement and support for the education system as the main contribution to student performance. There is also a strict system of entrance exams. Therefore, parents spend most of their income on the private education of children to prepare them for entrance exams at the university and allow them to study at a prestigious institution of higher education. A complicated selection system is related to competition in the employment market. Besides, education in South Korea has become a mechanism for the new social class formation and legitimation; education gives some chances to increase mobility even for people of unknown origin. Therein lies the function of forming the intellectual elite at the university. One feature that is not always positively reflected in the learning process can also be highlighted in Korean education. In the Republic of Korea, the system of rote memorization is applied everywhere at all stages of the educational process. If a pupil or student can "cram" any information, then his/her skills are also highly appreciated. It's related to the fact that before, in circumstances of the traditional Confucian education system, it was necessary to memorize the ancient canonical texts. However, this system does not encourage creative skills and the ability to think scientifically. Even though such a system is ineffective at present, the tradition is not going to disappear, and Koreans continue to follow the culture that has been embedded in education for many centuries. When considering higher education in the Republic of Korea, it is worth taking into account the fact that the development of education and science in the East took place based on the particular attitude to knowledge, which determines its national and culturally specific nature. Education has always been given special attention in the traditional values; science was a secondary occupation but no less significant. Therefore, a change in the higher education system and an attempt to introduce this model were implemented under the conditions of traditional Confucian values. Although the state is trying to introduce the Western model, the universities of South Korea retain their management system. Based on traditional Confucian values, Koreans are guided by an authoritarian model of relationships. These relationships are based on the status of a particular person that depends on social status, age, and gender. Clear distinctions help to achieve social stability and control system effectiveness. The relationship between the boss and the subordinate, as well as teachers and students, are following Confucian ethical principles. Control is conducted through legal authority and moral standards (Lee, 1999). Thus, the management system in Korean higher education carries a cultural background that is defined by formal authoritarianism and traditional collectivism based on Confucian values. The intellectual tradition of East Asia has its strengths and good potential to contribute to the idea of the university. The Eastern countries use models of both East Asian and Western universities. Both traditions are profoundly included in the activities of elite East Asian universities. While Western universities run mainly in a monocultural environment, leading East Asian universities operate in a unified culture that includes at least East Asia and the West. This combination is globally significant and historically unprecedented (Rui, 2017). Many studies demonstrate the positive effect of this synthesis on various academic and social fields, such as the ability to form wider friendship networks, increase cultural awareness, acquire global citizenship skills as well as improve conditions and innovations within the university (Shin & Moon, 2015).

## 7. Conclusion

East Asian countries demonstrate the success of the development of higher education and their participation in the global community through the integration of Western and traditional cultural values. Universities are currently exploring an alternative way to the future development of national education. The example of the universities of the Republic of Korea shows the possibility of striking a balance between Eastern and Western ideas of the university that have traditionally considered mutually exclusive. In the Republic of Korea, as in other eastern countries, the preservation of the cultural heritage of education is observed, which is an advantage. The culture of education also redefines education, which is currently interpreted not only as a way of obtaining knowledge and skills but is aimed at the comprehensive development of the individual. This has resulted in a reassessment of the so-called "non-cognitive learning" in the field of morality, values, relationships, ethics, etc. The East Asian countries, including the Republic of Korea, have retained both the positive aspects of their cultural traditions and those that can inhibit the transformation of the modern university. However, the intellectual tradition of East Asia has its strengths and good potential to contribute to the concept of the university. East Asian countries have an effective policy of gradual transformation of the university that maintains a sociocultural function and humanistic values in combination with technology and entrepreneurial activity.

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