

UPDATE ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN ASIA-PACIFIC REGION: POST-PANDEMIC MISSION OPPORTUNITY RE-BIRTH

Leiton Chinn

The January, 2019 edition of the 62nd Asia Missions Advance quarterly bulletin featured seven articles pertaining to the theme of International Student Ministry in Asia. The seven reports portrayed the growing presence of international students and ministries among them, in various countries in Asia including China, India, the Philippines, New Zealand, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Australia.

A year later, January, 2020, the wide-open door of missional opportunity for the Church in the greater Asia-Pacific region to engage in ministry among International Students began to close because of the new and emerging spread of the COVID-19 virus. And within three months, by March, 2020, the door was shut to international students traveling to study abroad around the world, including the Asia-Pacific region. The global CV-19 epidemic effected a death to international student mobility. But there was not only the closure that prevented the outflow of students to another country, but some countries brought back students in early 2020. China, which had 1.6 million of its citizens studying abroad, with 280,000 in Australia and New Zealand and 180,000 in Japan and South Korea, saw 200,000 returnees from overseas locations. Now, three years later, after the freeze and death of the former, normal dynamic of a growing trans-national student migration in the pan-Asia Pacific sector, we do see the encouraging signs of new life and re-birth of international students leaving home and selecting Asia and the Pacific as their preferred destination to study.¹

Australia has become the world's second most popular country for international students, and the early data of incoming students projects an avalanche by 2023.² China has recently lifted the restrictions for its students to go abroad and about 40,000 are expected to arrive in Australia at this time, adding to the critical need for housing that is in insufficient supply.³ Besides India and China supplying the largest number of international students in Australia, more students from Thailand, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Nepal, Pakistan, and Vietnam are choosing Australia.⁴ One literal 'open-door' opportunity is for the Church to extend hospitality and rent rooms to incoming students from abroad.

New Zealand, like Australia, had large numbers of international students in 2019, with 120,000 before the

pandemic struck. Because of extended international travel restrictions and closures, the number plummeted to below 15,000 in 2022.⁵ New Zealand's new 5-Step plan to receive international students again, begins with 5,000 students in April, 2023.⁶

Taiwan is seeking 200,000 international students⁷ mostly coming from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Previously China supplied the largest number of foreign-students, but growing geopolitical tensions between the two nations has significantly reduced the number of Chinese students.

India, which had 75,000 international students in 2019, saw the number drop to 20,561 in 2020. An increase of 3,000 students in 2021 was an early indicator of a likely renewal of an influx of students from abroad.⁸

Singapore had 1,500 Indian students in July, 2021, but that number significantly increased in less than a year to 10,000 in March, 2022.⁹

Japan's international student population decreased from more than 310,000 in fiscal year 2019 to 242,000 in fiscal year 2021. The encouraging news is that around 242,444 foreign students have arrived in Japan since March, 2022 with 110,000 still waiting to enter.¹⁰

Malaysia had about 40,000 new student applications from more than 150 nations, even during the pandemic.¹¹

Nepal is trying to become one of the growing hubs of education in Asia, as it seeks to attract more students from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan.¹²

Korea had a goal to reach 200,000 international students by 2023, but the pandemic impact greatly reduced the numbers during 2020 and 2021. Then the numbers increased from 152,000 in 2021 to 167,000 in 2022.¹³

5. ICEF Monitor, November 30, 2022

6. The PIE News, February 3, 2023.

7. Talent-Strapped Taiwan Seeks 200,000 Overseas Students, South China Morning Post, February 3, 2023.

8. University World News, September 8, 2022

9. The PIE News, July 12,

10. University World News, June 29, 2022

11. The PIE News, March 31, 2022.

12. Number of Foreign Students South Korea 2013-2022, Statista, January 17, 2023.

13. Number of Foreign Students South Korea 2013-2022, Statista, January 17, 2023.

1. Students Return to China, China Insight, March, 2020.

2. Australia Re-Asserts Itself as a Top Study Destination, University World News, Oct 25, 2022.

3. China Return Adds Pressure to Australia's Tight Supply, The PIE News, February 8, 2023.

4. ICEF Monitor, October 19 and November 9, 2022.

The Philippines had about 35,000 international students prior to the onset of CV-19, mostly medical students, with many from India, and many returned home. About 8,000 new international students enrolled, with about 3,000 from India.¹⁴

Thailand has about 20,000 international students according to Keystone Masterstudies.com.

How might the re-birth of international student mobility within the Asia-Pacific region be a God-given global missions opportunity? Will the Church in greater Asia be like the tribe of Issachar and understand the times and trends and know what to do about it?

Will the Church be ready and willing to receive the return of foreign students with God's hospitality? One avenue of participating in sharing God's love with international students is to partner with some existing International Student Ministries (ISMs) of local campus ministries, such as the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students in most countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Inquiries about ISMs in the region may be directed to Terry McGrath (ism1@inspire.net.nz), founding director of International Student Ministries New Zealand who has served as the initial Lausanne Facilitator for ISM in the Asia-Pacific Region since 2008, and also Steve Scott (sscott@lausanne.org), the new Lausanne Catalyst for ISM in

the Asia-Pacific region, who is based in Australia.

Some relevant resources on ISM are the Lausanne Global Classroom video series on ISM at: <https://lausanne.org/lausanne-global-classroom/international-student-ministry-episode> and, <https://www.acmi-ism.org/ism-resource-center>.

Additional resources are available at: <https://newwineskins.org/internationalstudentministry-resources#top>.



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14. This Old City, July 18, 2022.

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