

## **A Profile of Researchers in Open Distance and Adult Education in Asia and their Research Foci**

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### **Abstract**

Contemporary developments in tertiary open distance and adult education in Asia call for co-operation and collaboration in meeting the challenges of teaching and learning in rapidly developing economies. However, although there has been a great demand for academic exchange among open distance and adult education researchers and practitioners in Asian countries, most of them have difficulty acquiring sufficient information about the expertise within the region. One of the main obstacles is that there is no one major source or publication to obtain the necessary information. In view of this, the Centre for Research in Distance and Adult Learning of the Open University of Hong Kong has set up a data bank of researchers in Asian countries and their foci in tertiary open distance and adult education research. The data of each researcher include the correspondence address, education and training, research areas and interests, recent major publications, abstracts of recent research projects, and proposed future studies. The information of 400 researchers is summarized and analyzed. SPSS is employed for quantitative data analysis. This paper reports on a profile of open distance and adult education researchers in Asia and their foci from a comparative perspective.

### **Introduction**

The development of open distance education has been given ample attention in many parts of the world. In Asia, this attention has triggered off phenomenal growth. For example, with regard to the growth of the single-mode open universities, out of the 10 mega-universities offering adult and distance education in the world, five of them are located in the Asian region (China, India, Indonesia, South Korea and Thailand). In particular, the largest open distance education system in the world is in Mainland China. The Asian region also has the largest number of adult learners in open distance universities compared with other parts of the world. For instance, in Mainland China, there are 2.82 million adult students in 962 adult higher education institutions. (Ministry of Education in China, 1999). Amongst them, 690,000 of them enrolled in 45 radio and television universities (China Central RTV University, 1999). Amidst the huge population of 3 billion people in Asia which adds up to two-thirds of the global population, 500 million of them are potential students seeking continuing education opportunities. This implies an acute demand for open distance and adult education in the Asian region (Tam, 1999). It has been known that the competitive advantages of open distance education lie in the cost minimisation and efficiency maximisation due to the sharing of teaching resources regardless of time and space. Each member of society can have access to life-long education. To fully utilise the strengths of open distance education, the exchange and collaboration amongst open distance education researchers and practitioners in Asian countries should be high on the educational development agenda of each and every country in the region, and requires adequate, appropriate and comprehensive information source to locate and learn about the expertise available.

Although there has been a great demand for academic exchange in the field of open distance and adult education, most of the researchers have difficulty acquiring information about the expertise within the region. One of the major obstacles is that there is no one major source or publication to obtain the necessary information.

Our extensive literature search revealed that only two databases in open distance education are available: *Online Distance Education Database* compiled by *International Centre for Distance Learning (ICDL)* in the United Kingdom at 1997 (ICDL, 1997); and *The International Who Who in Distance Learning* (International Where+How, 1998). While the former database only contains information about distance learning courses and institutions, the latter one includes brief personal data. Besides, the information contained in both two databases about Asia is very small. For example, only one radio and television university and three conventional universities in Mainland China are included in the ICDL database. There are only three educators in Mainland in the second database. In view of these, the Centre for Research in Distance and Adult Learning (CRIDAL) of the Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) embarked on a project to set up a databank of researchers and their foci in tertiary open distance education research. The project has developed a database of expertise and currently has information on 400 open distance/adult researchers from 17 Asian countries/regions. The data on each researcher include the correspondence address, education and training, research areas and interests, commands of foreign languages, recent major publications, abstracts of recent research projects, and proposed future studies. The database also has information about the willingness of the researchers to liaise with other Asian open distance/adult education institutions.

A note should be made on the criteria of selecting the educators/researchers to be included in our databank. One of the most important purposes of setting up this database is to encourage exchange and contact amongst different universities and individuals in the Asian region. Therefore it is preferable to include as many open distance and adult education researchers as possible. The educators/researchers who conduct research in at least one area of open distance and adult education research are thus included. The objective of setting up this database could not be achieved if the databank contains only the few researchers who have extensive experience in many areas of open distance and adult education research.

This study summarised and analysed all data obtained from the researchers. SPSS was employed for data analysis. The paper reports on a profile of researchers in open distance and adult education in Asia and their expertise from a comparative perspective. Some suggestions are made about how to strengthen the academic collaboration amongst researchers in Asia. We hope this paper will give the academic community in Asia a better understanding of the current state of open distance education research in Asia. It is also hoped that the inter-country research collaboration will be fostered and future research agenda be improved.

## **The Database Building Procedure**

This project spanned over a period of about one year from September 1998 to August 1999 and consisted of the following six stages:

### ***Stage 1: Literature review and questionnaire design***

From our literature review, a number of education databases were located. However, there was no database with an exclusive emphasis on open distance and adult education research in Asia. In view of this, we designed a questionnaire for setting up the first Asian database of educators and their foci in distance/adult education research. With the suggestions from some open distance education experts, a draft questionnaire was designed

### ***Stage 2: Pilot study***

Copies of the draft questionnaires were sent to 20 internationally recognised experts of open distance/adult education. 14 out of the 20 copies were completed and returned by the experts in 11 countries. This amounted to 70% response rate. Some amendments were made based on respondents' comments. Having considered the fact that the open distance and adult education researchers in Mainland China account for about 50% of the total open distance and adult education research educators in Asia, we decided to print the questionnaire in both English and Chinese versions. For the Chinese version, two types were designed: one type with simplified Chinese characters and the other with traditional Chinese characters. The former is specially designed for researchers in Mainland China and Singapore and the latter for those in Taiwan and Hong Kong. These were further pilot-tested and suggested amendments made to the versions of the questionnaire.

### ***Stage 3: Main survey***

The mailing list of the open distance and adult education research was compiled through the following channels:

- (1) The participation lists in the Annual Conferences of Asian Association of Open Universities in 1996, 1997 and 1998, and Shanghai International Open and Distance Education Symposium 1998. The total number from these sources was 261.
- (2) List of researchers recommended by presidents of higher institutions of learning in Asia. We sent questionnaires to presidents in 68 open distance universities and 438 conventional universities in Asia. The responses received attested to the fact that the presidents were extremely helpful in passing the questionnaires to the open distance and adult education researchers in their universities.
- (3) Internationally recognised experts and leaders in the open distance and adult education research communities. In several Asian countries, some internationally recognised researchers and leaders in the open distance and adult education research community offered much assistance in delivering questionnaires to the researchers in their countries.
- (4) Government officials in the education departments in Asia.

### ***Stage 4: Reminder and Follow Up***

With full understanding that many researchers are extremely busy with their teaching, research and administrative work, a reminding letter and another copy of questionnaire were sent to non-respondents four weeks after we first sent out the questionnaire. This greatly boosted the response rate. Four more weeks later, the final reminding letters were sent. We are glad that the researchers are very co-operative and helpful and we have received many responses after each reminding letter.

### ***Stage 5: Translation, Proofreading and Seeking Consent from researchers for Publication***

All English questionnaires were translated into Chinese and *vice versa*. In compliance with the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Hong Kong) 1996, we sent the edited personal data to the researchers for their consent for CRIDAL, OUHK to publish the data and use them for research-related purposes.

### ***Stage 6: Sorting, Coding and Analysis of Data***

All the data received for this database exercise were sorted, coded and analysed. SPSS was employed for quantitative data analysis.

## **Sample**

All researchers in open distance and adult learning in Asia formed the population of the project. The total sample of this project included 400 open distance and adult education researchers from 17 countries/regions in Asia. Amongst them, 5 are from Bangladesh, Hong Kong 20, India 27, Indonesia 8, Iran 3, Japan 5, Macau 1, Mainland China 263, Malaysia 8, Mongolia 1, Pakistan 2, the Philippines 30, Singapore 1, South Korea 1, Sri Lanka 6, Taiwan 3 and Thailand 16.

The information for each researcher includes academic and administrative positions, correspondence address, telephone and facsimile numbers, electronic mail address and homepage, education and training history, research areas and interests, commands of foreign languages, recent major publications, abstracts of recent research projects, and proposed future studies. We also asked the researchers about their requests for liaising with other Asian open distance education institutions.

## **Results**

The major research outcomes can be classified into seven parts: (1) the sex and age distributions of the researchers, (2) the type of institution (e.g. open university, conventional university, etc.) the researcher is affiliated with, (3) the popularity of using electronic network among researchers and the English level of researchers, (4) the researcher's education and professional history, (5) the major research projects since 1995 and proposed future studies, (6) desired channels of linkage with other Asian open distance institutes.

### **(1) The Sex and Age Distributions**

*Table 1: The sex distribution of distance and adult education researchers in Asia*

<b><i>Sex</i></b>	<b><i>Number of respondents</i></b>	<b><i>Percentage</i></b>
Male	293	73.3 %
Female	106	26.5 %
No answer	1	0.2 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0 %</b>

*Table 2: The age distribution of distance and adult education researchers in Asia*

<b><i>Age</i></b>	<b><i>Number of respondents</i></b>	<b><i>Percentage</i></b>
Under 30	12	3.0 %
30-39	83	20.7 %

40-49	130	32.5 %
50-59	154	38.5 %
Above 59	19	4.8 %
No answer	2	0.5 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0 %</b>

The results on Table 1 indicate that the distribution of open distance and adult education researchers in Asia is extremely unbalanced. Males make up 73.3% of the total sample while the percentage for females is only 26.5%. This has confirmed the concern of many researchers over the lack of gender equality in the access to higher education and to senior positions in the workplace.

Table 2 shows the age distribution of open distance and adult education researchers in Asia. 71% of the total number of researchers aged between 40 and 59 and 43.3% of the total sample are over 50. The question of how to inject fresh impetus and vigour to the circle of open distance and adult education enterprise is something which needs to be addressed. One definite implication of these results is the need to train more younger or new researchers in this field.

(2) The distribution of affiliated institutions and the administrative positions of the researchers

Table 3 provides a list of the affiliated institutions of the open distance and adult education researchers.

*Table 3: The distribution of affiliated institutions of open distance and adult education researchers in Asia*

<i>Institutions</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Open distance learning institutions	161	40.2 %
Conventional institutions	234	58.4 %
Development aid organisations (e.g. ADB)	1	0.3 %
Government organisations	3	0.8 %
No answer	1	0.3 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0 %</b>

It is clear that amongst the 400 open distance education researchers, 40.2% of them are affiliated with institutions of open distance education and 58.4% come from conventional institutes. In other words, open distance and adult education are not confined to open distance learning institutions alone. Conventional institutions also play a significant role in the provision of open distance and adult education. Therefore, the collaboration between open distance learning institutions and conventional universities and the sharing of resources between the two are issues which demand closer scrutiny.

*Table 4: The distribution of administrative positions held by open distance and adult researchers in Asia*

<i>Administrative position</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
President/ Vice President	37	9.3%
Dean/ Deputy Dean/ Department Head/ Deputy Department Head/ Centre Director / Deputy Centre Director	205	51.2%
Researchers without Administrative Duties	158	39.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

From Table 4, it can be seen that the open distance and adult researchers in our sample command high-level administrative positions in their institutions. This has illustrated that the role of scholar-manager is becoming popular in Asia's higher learning institutions.

(3) The utilisation of computer network and the English language proficiency of researchers

The rapid development of information superhighway has made a great impact on various aspects of open distance and adult education, for example, management and instruction. Is the full impact of these changes felt in the Asian region? Table 5 provides an answer to this question indicating that 35.8% of the educators do not have email accounts of their own. Homepages, an efficient medium for exchange and communication, cannot be found in 52.5% of the educators' affiliated institutions. 95% of these researchers do not have personal homepages. These data reveal that the full impact of information technology has not yet been felt in Asia.

*Table 5: Percentage of computer network utilisation*

<i>Types of computer network</i>	<i>Yes (Percentage)</i>	<i>No (Percentage)</i>
Personal email account	257 (64.3%)	143 (35.7%)
Institution homepage	190 (47.5%)	210 (52.5%)
Personal homepage	20 (5.0%)	380 (95.0%)

English language is by far the most popular foreign language in Asia. 83.5% of the researchers can read English.

*Table 6: English language ability*

<i>Language ability</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
English (speaking)	232	58.0 %
English (writing)	226	56.5 %
English (reading)	334	83.5 %
Other foreign languages	152	38.0 %

(4) Education and professional experience

Table 7 illustrates the professional training in open distance and adult education received by the researchers in this study.

*Table 7: The professional training in distance and adult education of the researches*

<i>Degree/ Diploma/ Certificate/ Training in Open Distance and Adult education</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
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Ph. D.	10	2.5 %
Master	6	1.5 %
Bachelor	1	0.3 %
Diploma	2	0.5 %
Certificate	7	1.7 %
Training	2	0.5 %
No professional training in this field	372	93.0 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 7 reveals that a mere 7% (28) of the sample have received professional training in the field of open distance and adult education. Amongst them, only 12 of them received their specialist training in Asia. Three of these researchers are from China: one Ph. D. specialising in adult higher education and the other 2 certificate holders concentrating in adult education management. One educator was trained in Sri Lanka and received his distance education diploma from Sri Lanka Open University. India has trained 1 Ph.D. in adult education, 1 Ph.D. in extension education, and 6 graduates from Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) including 4 Masters in open distance education, 1 Bachelor in open distance education and 1 certificate holder in open distance education. The information available show that Beijing Normal University has taken in its first batch of Ph. D. students with specialisation in distance education in 1997 (Xiao, 1999).

(5) The major research projects undertaken since 1995 and proposed future research plan

Researchers were requested to provide information on research projects they have been in charge of or participated in since 1995, and their proposed future research plans. The information submitted has been classified into various research areas as listed in Table 8.

From table 8 below, we can see that *management and planning* (17.6%) and *evaluation and quality assurance* (12.2%) are the two most popular research areas amongst the research researchers. This might have something to do with the fact that 60 % of the researchers are senior-level management. They may have integrated their administrative experience into the research endeavour.

Comparing the major research projects undertaken by the researchers and their proposed future research plan, we found that there is a large difference of about 13% in the research area of *technology and media*. As have mentioned earlier, technology media and its application have attracted the most attention in distance and adult education research. However, there are many areas in which more research is needed. The areas many scholars have neglected include: *theory and philosophy, research methodology, research on distance learners (distance learning, learner characteristics, the modes of learning, student support services), economics of education, professional development of distance educators, culture and tradition*.

Table 8: The major research projects undertaken since 1995 and proposed future research plan

<b>Research areas</b>	<b>Major research projects since 1995</b>	<b>Proposed future research plan</b>
Management and planning	76 (17.6 %)	43 (11.6 %)
Evaluation and quality		

assurance	53 (12.2 %)	26 (7.0 %)
Course design and development	43 (10.0%)	24 (6.5%)
Distance teaching	41 (9.5%)	29 (7.7 %)
Adult education	36 (8.3 %)	29 (7.7 %)
History and development	35 (8.0 %)	29 (7.7 %)
Technology and media	24 (5.5 %)	67 (18.1 %)
Comparative education	22 (5.1 %)	21 (5.7 %)
Distance learning	17 (3.9 %)	13 (3.5 %)
Student support services	15 (3.5 %)	13 (3.5 %)
Equity and access	14 (3.2 %)	16 (4.3 %)
Learner characteristics	14 (3.2 %)	10 (2.7 %)
The modes of learning	12 (2.8 %)	15 (4.0 %)
Professional development of distance educators	12 (2.8 %)	11 (3.0 %)
Culture and tradition	7 (1.6 %)	6 (1.6 %)
Economics of education	6 (1.4 %)	10 (2.7 %)
Theory and philosophy	4 (0.9 %)	6 (1.6 %)
Research methodology	2 (0.5 %)	4 (1.1 %)
<b>Total</b>	<b>433 (100.0 %)</b>	<b>372 (100.0 %)</b>

(6) The proposed links with other Asian open distance and adult education institutions  
The researcher have suggested various ways to encourage academic exchange and contact amongst universities in the Asian region, the responses are summarised as follows:

*Table 9: Proposed links with other Asian open distance education institutions*

<b><i>Proposed links</i></b>	<b><i>Number of respondents</i></b>	<b><i>Percentage</i></b>
Information exchange	295	73.8 %
Academic visits	284	74.1 %
Collaborative research	234	60.8 %
Exchange of study materials	218	54.5 %
Joint course development	191	47.8 %
Joint training	216	54.0 %

The findings show that the researchers are eager to establish various forms of links among open distance universities in the region. More than 70% want to have more information exchange and academic visiting among the institutions while more than 60% want more collaborative research activities in the region. About half want to exchange study materials, develop courses and training programmes together.

## **Discussion**

Given the above findings from the survey, we can have the following analysis and discussion:

(1) The sex distribution of the open distance and adult education researchers in Asia  
From the sex distribution of the open distance and adult education researchers in Asia, it

can be seen that the female accounts for only one-fourth of the total number. Some research (Sesharatnam, 1995; Kanwar, 1995; Gandhe, 1998) have shown that due to various social, cultural, economic and religious factors, women in many Asian countries cannot have the same kind of access to higher education as their male counterparts. Consequently, there are fewer female researchers in the academia. Although in these countries, men and women have the equal opportunities to education under government policy, some women still lack the confidence to compete with their male counterparts due to traditional belief, assumption and expectations on sex roles. For example, Zhang (1998) found that a considerable number of middle school boys and girls have the belief that boys should aim high in their academic pursuit because career is the most important thing to men. Conversely, as girls are going to spend a large amount of time on domestic affairs, they should take the educational path which can fetch them less challenging and relatively stable jobs. Some boys and girls even think that boys are more intelligent than girls while girls have the upper hand in dealing with family affairs. Some female students, when encountering setbacks in their studies or failing in an examination, tend to blame it on the weaknesses of their gender. This conventional wisdom will definitely be detrimental for females to fully develop their potentials. It is a well-known fact that human capital development is the key to national economic and social development. If women of a country cannot have the equal educational opportunities as their male counterparts, or lack the incentive or motivation to compete with men, then it is quite obvious that many talents will be untapped. The under-utilisation of human resources will undoubtedly result in tremendous social wastage.

## (2) The application of modern information technology

From the survey findings, it appears that the information technology resources have not been fully utilised in many of the Asian regions. Some educators (Kirkwood, 1997) have predicted that in the following decades, information technology is going to play an increasingly important role. The technology will become an economical means for sustainable educational development. The challenges facing educational policy makers will include for example how to utilise network technology to better serve students. The acquisition and application of information technology are going to have a large impact on the open distance and adult teaching. As pointed out by Tam (1999), the emerging paradigm will be one which emphasises flexible interactive student-centred learning and virtual learning environment.

However, the capital input is a necessary condition for the widespread application of information technology in open distance and adult education. Research (Zhang, Jegede, Ng, Kwok, & Tsui, 1999) has shown that the open distance education institutions in most Asian countries do not receive sufficient funding from their governments. The conventional universities have received huge financial support from the government whilst the open distance learning ones have very limited, if any, assistance from the government in terms of funding. In view of this, open distance education researchers have called for a reassessment of the social, economic and cultural contributions of open distance education under the new paradigm of lifelong education.

In our survey, more than 60% of the researchers are senior level management in their institutions. A considerable number of them engage in the research on management and planning of open distance education. We believe that regional collaborative research can provide theoretical and empirical bases for the petition for more funding.

Although more funding is clearly desirable, it is equally important for open distance and adult researchers to try their best to keep abreast of the new development in modern information technology. In this way, the Asian open distance and adult learning institutions can maintain its competitive edge against their counterparts in the developed countries, and fully utilise the advantage of resources sharing in this information era.

(3) Open distance and adult education: the formulation of a new academic discipline

Ding (1997) has argued that open distance and adult education has established itself as a new discipline of academic pursuit. He cited evidence in the areas such as the existence of various international open distance and adult education organisations, academic journals and publications, the growth of academic exchange, the theoretical foundation and the academic structure of the discipline, and the courses offered at universities. He also found that many universities in the western countries have offered bachelor, masters and doctoral degrees in open distance and adult education. However, in most areas of the Asian region, systematic academic training in open distance and adult education is still the exception and not the rule. From the age distribution of the educators whose information are in the database, it is evident that more than 40% of the open distance and adult education researchers are over 50 and about 32.5% are between 41 and 49. In view of this, to establish the new academic discipline of open distance education and to train a new generation of young open distance educators should be high on the development agenda of each and every Asian country.

We also found that amongst the 400 educators in our study, 40.2% of them work in open distance learning institutions and 58.4% are from conventional universities. The issues concerning the competition between open distance learning institutions and conventional universities remain controversial. We think that many conventional universities are fully aware of the prospects of open distance education and this is without doubt beneficial to the long-term development of open distance education. The mission of open distance and adult learning institutions is to provide every member of the society with the opportunities for life-long education. And the demand for open distance and adult education is indeed very great in Asian countries. On the other hand, one of the many strengths of open distance education is its resource sharing capacity. Therefore more collaboration and exchange should be carried out between open distance education and conventional universities. For instance, while capable and willing academics in conventional universities can tutor in open distance education universities, instructional developers, student support and information and communication technology educators in open distance and adult universities can share their expertise with colleagues in conventional universities.

(4) Major research projects

Among the major research projects researchers have taken charge of or participated in, *management and planning* and *evaluation and quality assurance* are those that have attracted the highest number of open distance and adult educators. This may be because that more than 60% of the educators are senior level management. They relate the research projects to their management expertise. This will contribute significantly to the enhancement of management efficiency and hence the quality of educational outcomes.

Comparing the research projects undertaken by the educators since 1995 and their

proposed future projects, there is a strong similarity between the two. An exception is in the area of *technology and media* which has attracted much larger attention as a possible future research area. Many educators seem to be aware of the increasing role played by modern information technology in open distance and adult education, and this might account for why technology and media is high on the research agenda of a large number of research educators.

Nevertheless, there are many areas of open distance and adult education that require more attention, such as *theory and philosophy, research methodology*, research concerning distance learners (*distance learning, learner characteristics, the modes of learning, student support services*), *economics of education, professional development of distance educators, and culture and tradition*.

*Theory and philosophy* and *research methodology* are the cornerstones of any well-established academic disciplines. Although lots of theories and propositions of open distance and adult education have evolved around the world, many of them merely give a Western perspective of the total picture. Although we have much to learn from these Western theories, they may not cater for the indigenous needs of Asian countries in terms of politics, economy, culture, language and education. A simple 'cut and paste' method will definitely do more harm than good. We think that the Asian countries should strengthen their research on the theoretical and philosophical aspects of open distance and adult education in order to develop open distance education theories and philosophies with indigenous characteristics. On the other hand, many new research methodologies have been developed in recent years, for example, on-line electronic discussion groups, student evaluation and survey using computer network, etc.

Another point worth mentioning is that many researchers in Asia are still focusing on distance *teaching* rather than on distance *learning*. The reason is probably that teacher-centred distance education is still the prevalent idea in many of the open distance and adult learning institutions in Asia. Tam (1997, p.10) has stated that, "Regrettably...East Asian distance education is rather slow in making the transition from distance teaching to distance learning. If care were not taken the world would have made another significant leap toward virtual learning while we still continue to struggle with distance teaching using first generation instructional and communication technologies. The time has come to modernise very drastically our concept and practice of distance and open education to yield even greater dividends than we currently have".

The *professional development of distance educators* also deserves more attention. The pedagogical methods in distance education and conventional education have a very sharp distinction. However, most of the tutors in open distance universities are from conventional universities. The training they received on how to facilitate the learning activities of distance learners is usually quite limited. Most of the time they resort to conventional teaching methods to teach the distance learners, which are often not very appropriate and effective. Although the tutors work on a part-time basis, most of them are dedicated and responsible teachers. However there are also a small number of them who do not demonstrate such qualities. Experiences from a number of students' roundtable meetings have indicated that students have often complained of the quality of services they receive from some tutors. For example, at one such meeting, a very strong voice laden with frustration and probably typifying the view of many students said, 'If we

get an effective and responsible tutor, we are lucky enough and we can easily pass the course. If we are allocated a poor tutor, it is very likely that more students would fail compared with other groups'. To ensure the quality of open distance education, we need to devise a sound system of recruiting, supervising and evaluating tutors.

In the open distance and adult education process, research on cost effectiveness is of utmost importance. The *economics of education* provides a perspective for analysing open distance and adult education policy on national, local and institutional levels. In addition, the rapid development of modern information technology has made the dream of global education a reality. In examining the relational between globalisation and localisation, the research on *culture and tradition* should play a significant role. According to Carr (Zhang, 1999, p.30), the development of global education is made possible by the advances in modern information technology, however, this may result in a cultural imperialism' in which education programmes on the communication highways are out of place in the cultural and linguistic contexts to which they are explored". Carr pointed out that global knowledge should be absorbed with the consideration of indigenous needs.

#### (5) Exchange and collaboration in open distance and adult education within Asia

The open distance and adult education researchers in Asia are eager to strengthen the linkages with other institutions by promoting greater academic exchange and collaboration as shown in the results for the study. There are a lot of requests from the researchers for information exchange, academic visiting, exchanging study materials, joint course development and joint training.

The survey findings show that English is by far the most commonly used foreign language among the 400 Asian educators. 83.5% of them can read English. Therefore English should be the medium of communication in academic exchange. On the other hand internet has played an important role in facilitating exchange and collaboration. However, we have found that only around 50% of the universities have the internet facilities. Amongst those which have internet, many of them only display their local language on their websites. For example, the University of the Air in Japan displays only Japanese on its website, and National University of the Air in Taiwan only has Chinese. This greatly hampers the exchange of information among universities in different Asian countries.

### **Limitations**

The study has utilised all the information and data from our data collection exercise. Relatively speaking, there are lots of data and information in this data bank. However, we admit that there are a number of limitations. First, some open distance and adult educators may have been too busy with their academic and administrative work to take time to fill out the registration forms. Second, there are a number of educators who prefer not to disclose their personal particulars. Third, we have sent questionnaires to university presidents; some of them for various reasons might not be able to pass the forms to their staff. Because of the various limitations listed, our information and data might not be able to include all open distance and adult education researchers in the Asian region. There are hence limitations to the conclusions we have made, which are largely based on these data.

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Dr. ZAHANG Weiyuan had BEd and MEd degrees from East China Normal University and a PhD from the University of Edinburgh. He was a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Hong Kong from 1996 to 1997. He has had fourteen years' research experience as an educational researcher at East China Normal University, the University of Victoria, the University of Edinburgh, the University of Hong Kong. Since 1998 he has been a research fellow at the Open University of Hong Kong. His research interests are open and distance education, comparative education, education in Greater China, educational psychology, guidance and counselling.