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# INDO-FRENCH EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Institutions,  
Technologies and  
Higher Education

**Marc Pilkington**



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Institutions, Technologies and Higher Education

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Cover illustration: Pattern adapted from an Indian cotton print produced in the 19th century

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## PREFACE

What makes our societies grow and prosper? This question is almost as old as the field of economics itself. Growth theory morphed into a branch of economics in its own right throughout the twentieth century, with major economists, such as Schumpeter and Solow, offering theories and models based on capital accumulation and technological progress. As Greenwald and Stiglitz (2014, p. 14) note, subsequent attempts at the precise quantification of the respective roles of the different inputs in growth theory proved extremely difficult, mainly because the inputs under scrutiny were intertwined. The implementation of new technologies is hence contingent on the availability of capital equipment, such as new machines, and the respective contribution of capital accumulation and technological progress to productivity growth is perhaps porous, at least, not as clear-cut as early growth models seemed to suggest.

This reflection has acquired a qualitative dimension with the introduction of a new element, namely learning. It is an undisputable fact that no matter how these phenomena are explained, quantified or measured, growth and prosperity are also about ‘learning to do things better’ (2014, p. 14). In this sense, one should never understate the conditions (material, economic, intellectual and spiritual) created by policymakers, to promote and enhance the learning environment of their citizens.

Not only is the pace of learning (innovation) the most important determinant of increases in standards of living, the pace itself is almost surely partially, if not largely, endogenous. The speed of progress has differed

markedly both over time and across countries, and while we may not be able to explain all of this variation, it is clear that government policies have played a role. Learning is affected by the economic and social environment and the structure of the economy, as well as public and private investments in research and education. (2014, p. 15)

Hernes (2006, p. 3) argues that ‘to provide skilled workers, administrators, technicians, engineers, doctors and nurses, indeed, to manage all sectors of the modern economy by applying advanced knowledge, a well-functioning education system is mandatory and higher education has an important role to play’.

The central nature of knowledge was acknowledged by the OECD as early as 1996.

The OECD economies are increasingly based on knowledge and information. Knowledge is now recognised as the driver of productivity and economic growth, leading to a new focus on the role of information, technology and learning in economic performance. The term ‘*knowledge-based economy*’ stems from this fuller recognition of the place of knowledge and technology in modern OECD economies. (OECD 1996, p. 3)

This takes us to the central locus of higher education provision.

A university is a place where new ideas germinate, strike roots and grow tall and sturdy. It is a unique space, which covers the entire universe of knowledge. It is a place where creative minds converge, interact with each other and construct visions of new realities. Established notions of truth are challenged in the pursuit of knowledge. (Yashpal Committee report 2009, p. 9)

Beyond the confines of advanced economies, progress has been made since the 1990s, with regard to the fundamental role of emergent economies in this wide-ranging transformation, and the shift towards a global knowledge-based economy.

In this new configuration, how do economies differ, or complement each other? How do they diverge or converge? Can potential synergies between learning institutions, beyond national boundaries, traditions and cultures, be identified *ex ante*? A decisive event that led to the drafting of the present book was the opportunity for collaborative research funded by the University Grants

Commission, Delhi, and FMSH, Paris, on ‘International Trade in Higher Education Services in a Post-GATS Scenario: Learning Experiences for India and France’ in 2008. We were hosted at the time by the research unit CNRS-GREDEG, Valbonne, under the guidance of Professor Dominique Torre.

A joint-presentation was given at UNESCO in November 2008. In the following years, our Indo-French research cooperation flourished, with several academic papers published in leading international journals, such as *International Journal of Education Economics and Development* or *European Journal of Education*. This book is the latest achievement in this ongoing cooperation between France and India. Hopefully, it will benefit academics, students, administrators and policymakers of the two countries, and beyond.

Marc Pilkington and Geeta Nair

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# Why France and India? The Convergence Hypothesis

**Abstract** The cross-fertilization of insights derived from French and Indian intellectual history has ignited a pluridisciplinary reflection on the role played by these two countries in the fabric of the knowledge-based economy in the twenty-first century. On the one hand, the Age of Enlightenment in Western Europe in the eighteenth century, brought forward an autonomous position for knowledge in human societies, and, on the other hand, it was once predicted that India's future would be built in her classrooms (Education Commission). Finally, we lay the ground for the characterization of a triple knowledge-based convergence between the two higher-education systems on academic, economic and institutional grounds.

**Keywords** Cross-fertilization · France · India · Intellectual history · Age of enlightenment · Knowledge · Reason · Convergence hypothesis

## 1.1 THE CROSS-FERTILIZATION OF FRANCE AND INDIA'S INTELLECTUAL HISTORIES

### 1.1.1 *The Role of Education in Indian Philosophy*

For Radhakrishnan (2008, [1923], p. 5), at the pure metaphysical level, there exist six principal Indian systems of thought called darshanas or visions of reality. These systems differ with particular meanings assigned

to fundamental terms in Hinduism, such as avidya, maya, purusa and jiva (ibid., p. 10). Despite the plurality of names (intuition, revelation, cosmic consciousness and god-vision) given to this reality order, there is *something* in Indian philosophy, like super-consciousness that transcends the consciousness of the self. Another common feature is that logic, though valid in its own right, is subordinated to the forces of the spirit: ‘life cannot be comprehended in its fullness by logical reason’ (ibid.).

Hinduism offers a powerful dialectic between determinism and freedom of choice: ‘it is a fundamental belief of the Hindus that the universe is law-abiding to the core, and yet man is free to shape his own destiny in it’ (ibid., p. 11). This is where the role of education comes in, in Indian philosophy (ibid.):

Our actions still pursue us from afar,  
And what we have been makes us what we are

Is not this the quintessence of education after all? Learning activities undergone today will turn us into the informed citizens and the skilled workers of tomorrow.

### ***1.1.2 The French Paradox and the Resurgence of the Camdessus Report***

#### ***1.1.2.1 Defining the French Nation?***

Winock (2009, p. 179) reminds us of a frequent conception underpinned by the ‘them and us’ dichotomy. He goes on by asking what the French ‘us’ really means. At the time of the French Revolution, Abbe Sieyes (Winock, ibid., p. 180) foreshadowed the modern idea of the nation, by stating that it preexists everything, it is the origin of everything, its will is always legal, and is even synonymous with the Law. Drawing on the insights of Renan (1882), Winock (ibid., p. 183) argues that the idea of nation takes on a dual dimension. Firstly, it arises out of the common needs of the people, composed of various social groups seeking a collective identity. The nation is a daily referendum or ‘a permanent plebiscite’ (Renan 1882), and a collective desire to project this identity in the future. A nation is ‘the fact of sharing, in the past, a glorious heritage and regrets, and of having, in the future, [a shared] programme to put into effect, or the fact of having suffered, enjoyed, and hoped together’.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1.2.2 *A Good Overall Performance Despite a Prevailing Declinist Ideology*

France is largely recognized as a wealthy and highly developed country. It was ranked 22nd worldwide in 2014 for the indicator of human development (UNDP 2016), and recorded the sixth GDP behind the UK and Germany. Yet, the ‘declinist’ ideology has never been as vivid as today. On France Culture (2014), this recurring theme in the contemporary French intellectual landscape was tackled in a radio broadcast. Drawing on the best-seller ‘Le Suicide Français’ by the polemist Eric Zemmour (2014), also echoing ‘La France qui Tombe’ by Nicolas Baverez (2003), Frank (2014) engages in a constructive dialogue with a journalist about his book *La hantise du déclin*. Declinism being a recurring idea in French History (e.g. the 1940 defeat against Germany, the aftermath of decolonization, the end of the ‘Trente Glorieuses’), Frank argues that the declinist discourse is rooted, from an anthropological standpoint, in the loss of optimism and confidence in progress, tantamount to the idea that our children will be worse off than the current generation. Throughout this insightful exchange, Frank argues that decline *per se* is the symbolic perception, well-entrenched in the French collective consciousness, of pessimistic tendencies and outlooks on the societal front (in contrast with utter and irremediable decay, which was never admitted by the French).

### 1.1.2.3 *The Insights of the Camdessus Report (2004)*

By the time of the Camdessus Report (2004), the world had already changed. Chapter 3 ‘Where to go and how to do it?’ raises the issues of growth, modernization and the fight against unemployment. It echoes Renan’s transformation of countries, in order to facilitate the projection of the nation, bound by a collective identity. Adjustments always prove inevitable, but the future nevertheless remains open. Any deterministic declinist trajectory is therefore ruled out, although the threat is tangible (*ibid.*, p. 21):

History teaches us that, in the process of economic growth, there are virtuous circles, but also risks of negative sequences. Some countries manage to take off, while others fall. The onset of these evolutions is often imperceptible. Then, they accelerate and become, within the span of a generation, largely irreversible. France probably lies at such an inflexion point today.