Building Capacity for School Leadership Research & Development in the Asia-Pacific Region

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Demands for School Leadership & Research

The Asia-Pacific Region shares the largest school-age population (nearly 50%) of the world. There are over 500 million school students, 26 million teachers and one million school leaders in primary and secondary schools in the Region[1]. (see Figure 1) The school leadership has a leverage effect on the improvement of schools. If the leadership competence of these one million school leaders can be further enhanced, the performance of the 26 million teachers can be improved and the learning of 500 million students can be ensured and benefitted for their future. But, how to effectively enhance school leadership remains a very significant issue unanswered by research in most parts of the Asia-Pacific Region.

Figure 1: Impacts of School Leadership in the Asia-Pacific Region

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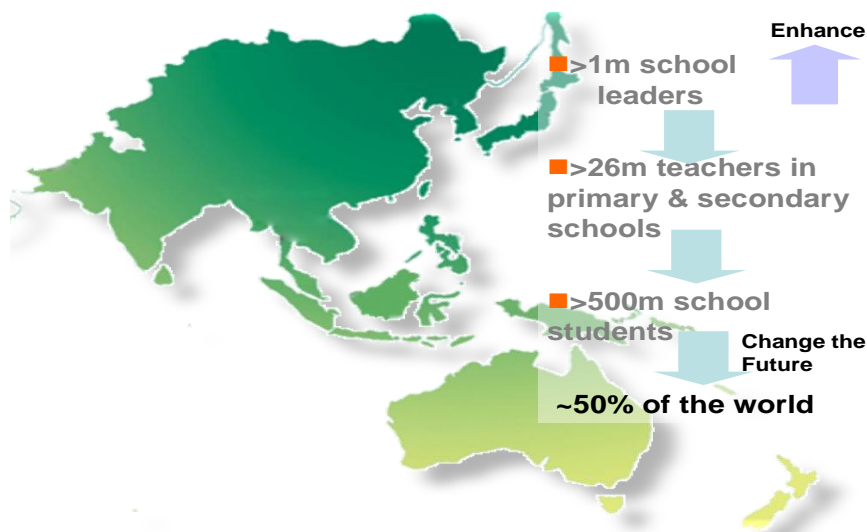
[1] Estimated from the data of UNESCO, Institute of Statistics (2006): *Teachers and education quality: Monitoring global needs for 2015*; UNESCO, Institute of Statistics (2009): *Global education digest*.

In the coming two decades, the Asia-Pacific Region will continue to be the most fast growing area in the world, driving the economic development globally and in particular producing the largest number of tertiary graduates and related human capital for knowledge-based economy. Clearly, there is an urgent need of capable school leadership that can transform the school systems with aims to support the enhancement of human capital and the fast developments in the Region.

Currently, there is lack of a comprehensive research base specifically to inform the development and enhancement of school leadership in the Region. Even though the Western theories of school leadership are popular and dominating in the circle of academic community, it is generally believed that they may not be so valid, relevant and applicable to the cultural contexts of the Region. The development of culture-sensitive theory and research for leadership performance in the Asia-Pacific is in increasing demand. This speech aims to address the issues of building capacity for school leadership research and development in the context of various ongoing education changes in the Region.
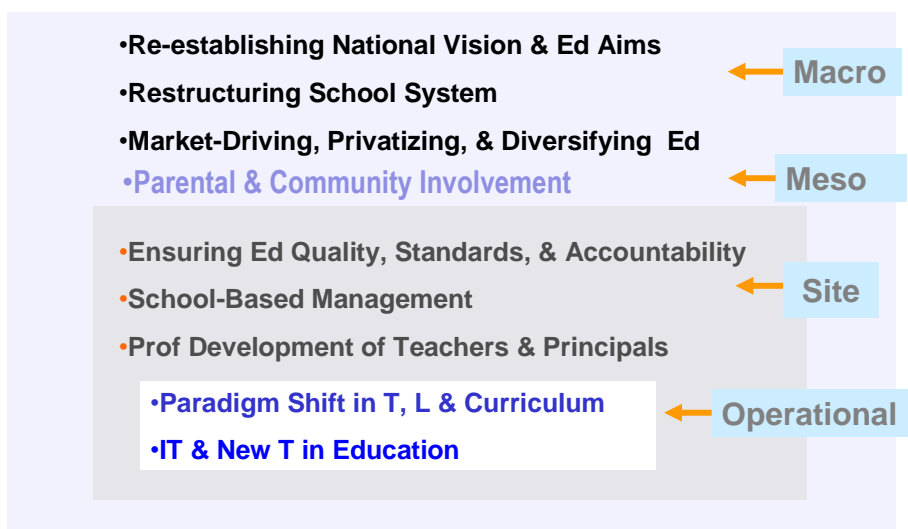
New Leadership Capacity for Trends of Education Changes

In response to the challenges and impacts of globalization, high technology, economic transformation, international competitions and local developments in the new century, education reforms have become necessary for most countries in the world. In particular, nine major trends of changes in different areas and levels of education have been evident in the Asia-Pacific Region. (see Figure 2)

At the macro level, the main trends of educational reforms include re-establishing a new national vision and new educational aims for schools; restructuring education systems at different levels for new educational aims; and market-driving, privatizing, and diversifying school education.

At the meso level, increasing parental and community involvement in education and management is a salient trend. At the site level, the major trends consist of ensuring education quality, standards, and accountability in educational institutions; implementing decentralization and school-based management; and enhancing teacher quality and lifelong professional development.

Figure 2: Nine Trends of Education Changes in the Asia-Pacific

- **Re-establishing National Vision & Ed Aims**
- **Restructuring School System** ← **Macro**
- **Market-Driving, Privatizing, & Diversifying Ed**
- **Parental & Community Involvement** ← **Meso**
- **Ensuring Ed Quality, Standards, & Accountability**
- **School-Based Management** ← **Site**
- **Prof Development of Teachers & Principals**
- **Paradigm Shift in T, L & Curriculum** ← **Operational**
- **IT & New T in Education**

(adapted from Cheng, 2005)

At the operational level of school, the main trends include using information and communication technology (ICT) in learning and teaching and applying new technologies in management, and making a paradigm shift in learning, teaching, and assessment. These nine trends of educational changes at different levels have changed nearly every key aspect of most education systems in the Region and created tremendous impacts on the context of education leadership and its practice. The challenges and implications of these contextual changes for new school leadership can be further illustrated as shown in Table 1.

The success of implementing these changes in schools depends heavily on the leadership capacity of school leaders, whether they are able to motivate and empower teachers to make change and whether they are able to manage so many changes and related impacts successfully in a limited time frame with limited resources.

How can the school leadership be well prepared & effective for these challenges & changes in the contexts of the Region? In particular, how can the practice and development of school leadership can be specifically informed by the research on these trends of education reforms such that school leaders can have the new capacity to effectively implement these reforms for facilitating new teaching and new learning? All remain unanswered questions.

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Table 1:   Contextual Changes & Implications for New Leadership in Education

Contextual Changes & Challenges		Implications for School Leadership
From Traditional Focus	To New Focus	
Short-Term Achievement	New Education Visions for the Future	• **New Visions**: Leading the formulation and implementation of new educational visions and aims at the school level
Public Funding	Privatization and Marketization	• **Increasing Competitions:** Leading the school to face up to external challenges and competitions for resources and survival • **New Positioning:** Leading the school re-positioning and organizational learning in a competitive market
Isolated School Management	Parental and Community Involvement	• **Close Interface:** Leading parents and the community for partnership and collaboration • **Social Network:** Leading a social network and building up alliances
School Maintenance	School Quality and Accountability	• **Stakeholders' Expectations**: Leading and satisfying diverse stakeholders' expectations • **Accountability:** Leading school accountability to multiple internal and external stakeholders
External Structural Control	School-based Management and Human Initiative	• **Participation:** Leading collaboration and participation of multiple stakeholders in school management • Leading and developing a community of leaders within the school
School Improvement	Continuing School and Staff Development	• **Multi-level Developments:** Leading multi-level developments, including individual staff, groups, the school, and the community
Application of Simplistic Techniques	Technological and Cultural Changes	• **Changes and Paradigm Shifts**: Leading the implementation of technological and cultural changes and paradigm shifts in education and management

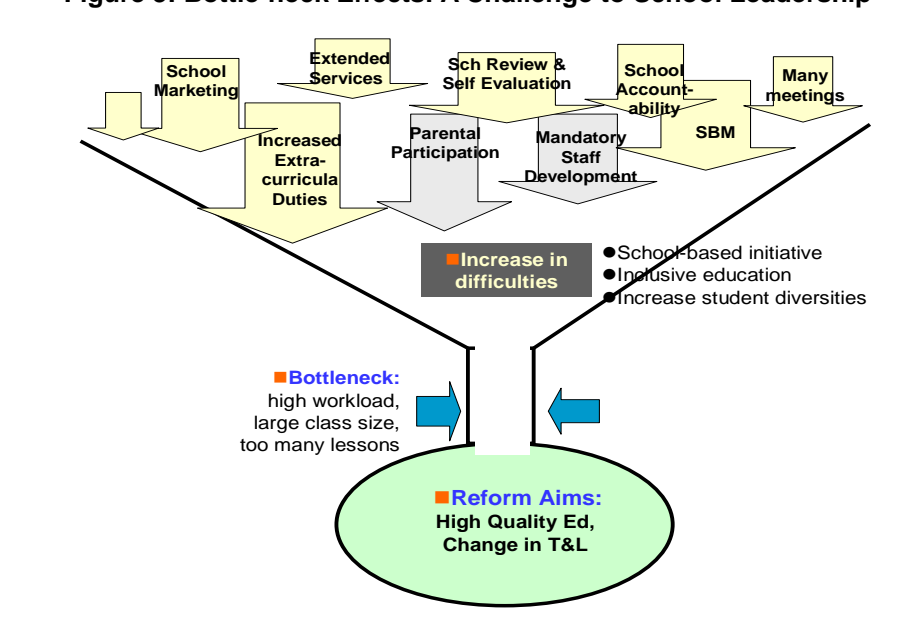(adapted from Cheng, 2010 in press)

Ignorance of the Complexity of Leadership & Change

In the past decade, many of these education changes with good intentions and huge resources investment have been found ineffective and unsustainable if not totally failed. Also, there has been emerging evidence of negative impacts of these reforms on the education system and teachers in some areas of the Region. The over-competition from marketization, the close control from accountability measures, the increasing workload from numerous initiatives, the de-professionalization from over-management and monitoring and the high pressure from uncertainties and ambiguities in education environment were some typical problems that potentially damage teachers' well being and working conditions. Many teachers were burnt-out and overburdened with unnecessary busy work.

In the case of Hong Kong in 2004 when education reforms were in peak

implementation, nearly 25.2% of Hong Kong teachers reported to have mood disorders. Around 50%-52% of primary teachers felt that their work was 'out of control' and that they suffered from over work-related pressure. Others reported insomnia (50.9%), temper loss (48.6%), and physical discomfort (46.6%). 4% to 5.2% of them had thought about suicide. The status of the teaching profession experienced serious decline and the schools lost many competent teachers. The quality of teaching and learning inevitably deteriorated. These negative impacts of education changes on schools and teachers have been explained by the existing *bottle-neck effects* of implementing many parallel changes as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Bottle-neck Effects: A Challenge to School Leadership

(adapted from Cheng, 2009a)

To a great extent, the emergence of bottle-neck effects was mainly due to the ignorance of complexity of education reforms and changes. Why were the school leaders and policy-makers not informed by the research about the bottle-neck effects before the implementation of parallel changes? Why was there no research to inform the school leaders and policy-makers how to manage these parallel changes and reduce the negative impacts of bottle-neck effects?

Limitations of 1st Order Research

Even though each trend of education changes and related leadership practices might have been supported by its theoretical merits and tested by some empirical pilot studies locally or internationally, unfortunately these studies are mainly *1st order*

research focusing on understanding of only certain aspects of leadership and change at one level in this trend and targeting to complete in a short period often with limited resources, single disciplinary perspective, and cross-sectional research design. (see Table 2) They can provide only limited and fragmented understanding of the processes of leadership and changes. Their contribution to the prediction and explanation of impacts and effects of leadership and change is inevitably limited. Also their relevance to the theory advancement, leadership development and change implementation is often thin.

Therefore, this kind of 1st order research is unable to provide a comprehensive knowledge base to understanding of the complexity of multiple and parallel changes in education and developing the capacity of new school leadership in the Asia-Pacific Region. It also explains why this traditional 1st order research is unable to inform the school leaders and policy-makers how to prepare and manage parallel changes and their potential negative impacts of bottle-neck effects before implementation.

Table 2: 1st Order and 2nd Order Research on Leadership and Change

|	**1st Order Research**	**2nd Order Research**
Strengths	• Focus on understanding of certain aspects of leadership and changes • Complete in a short period with limited resources and single disciplinary perspective	• More comprehensive understanding the complexity of various aspects of school leadership, parallel changes and their related impacts • Contribute to theory advancement for predicting and explaining the leadership impacts and change effects across levels and across domains • Stronger relevance to theory advancement for effective change implementation and leadership development
Limitations	• Often cross-sectional research design • Limited and fragmented understanding of the processes of leadership & change • Limited contribution to the prediction and explanation of impacts and effects of leadership & change • Limited relevance to the theory advancement for leadership development & change	• Much more time and resource consuming; • Much more challenging and demanding on the research capacity of researchers • Much more complicated or sophisticated research designs to be needed; • Multi-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary perspectives to be needed

New Capacity for 2nd Order Research in the Region

In order to achieve a more comprehensive knowledge base for understanding and managing the complexity of various aspects of school leadership, parallel changes and their impacts, we need to build up the new capacity for *2nd Order Research* in the

Asia-Pacific Region, that can apply multi-disciplinary perspectives across levels and across domains of changes with longitudinal research designs, for investigating: (see Table 2 & Figure 4)

(1) the characteristics and related impacts of whole cycles of multiple and parallel changes initiated at different levels (including macro, meso, site and operational levels); and

(2) the necessary new school leadership capacity for preparing, launching, managing and implementing these changes successfully.

With the multi-disciplinary conceptualization and sophisticated longitudinal research design, the 2nd order research on leadership and change can contribute to predicting and explaining the complicated leadership impacts and change effects and also can have stronger relevance to theory advancement for effective change implementation and leadership development. Compared with the 1st order research, the 2nd order research may be much more time and resource consuming and much more challenging and demanding to the research capacity of researchers. How to build the capacity for 2nd order research on school leadership and development in the Asia-Pacific Region should be a very important agenda of education development facing both the academics and policy-makers.

Figure 4: 2nd Order Research across Levels/ Domains
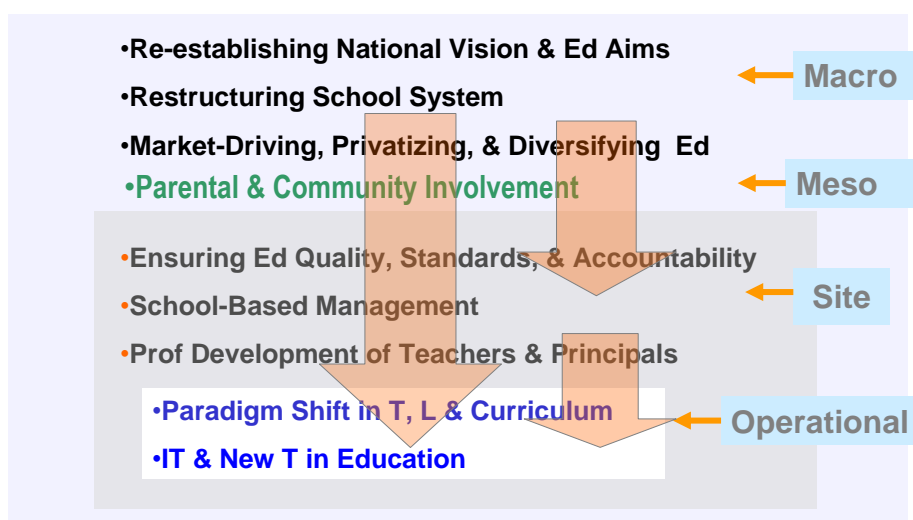
2nd Order Leadership Research & Paradigms of Reforms

In the past two decades, the numerous education reforms in the Region have experienced three waves of movements including the *effective school movements*, *quality school movements* and *world-class school movements*. Each wave of reforms works within its own paradigm in conceptualizing the nature of education and leadership and formulating related leadership strategies and initiatives for improvement of education practice at system, site, and operational levels. When there is a transition of education reforms from one wave to the other, there will be *paradigm shifts* in conceptualization and practice of learning, teaching and leadership. The three waves of education reforms provide a new typology to conceptualize school leadership into three paradigms: (1) *Internal Leadership*; (2) *Interface Leadership* and (3) *Future Leadership*. The major characteristics of each paradigm of leadership are completely different from the others, as summarized in Table 3.

With this typology of school leadership, implications can be drawn for 1st and 2nd order research on leadership in the Asia-Pacific as below:

1st Order Research with Single Paradigm: This is the traditional conception of leadership research based *on one single paradigm* with focus on investigating the related factors and characteristics of leadership in terms of leadership context, leadership purpose, leadership practice, leadership impacts, or/and leadership development. In the past three decades, numerous studies of leadership in education in the Asia-Pacific were mainly the 1st order research with focus on internal leadership. The 1st order research on interface leadership or future leadership is still underdeveloped not only in the Asia-Pacific but also in other parts of the world. In particular, building capacity for future leadership research with the third wave paradigm should receive more attention in coming years in the Region.

Table 3: Three Paradigms of School Leadership (adapted from Cheng 2009c)

	First-Wave Paradigm	Second-Wave Paradigm	Third-Wave Paradigm
About the Education Environment	- Maintaining an industrial society - Comparatively stable & predictable with few uncertainties and competitions - Education provision and content under the centralized manpower planning - School management under external control by bureaucracies - Little school autonomy	- Serving a commercial and consumption society - Unstable and fast changing with lots of uncertainties and competitions - Education provision and content mainly driven by competition and marketization - School-based management with accountability framework and stakeholder participation - Bounded school autonomy under central monitoring and external review	- Towards a life-long learning & multiple development society - Fast changing with impacts from internationalization and technology advances - Education provision and content mainly characterized by globalization, localization and individualization - Towards independent world-class school management with both local and global relevance - School autonomy with local and international benchmarking
Movements and Reforms	**Effective School Movements:** To improve the internal process and performance of schools in order to enhance the achievements of planned goals of education	**Quality School Movements:** To ensure the quality and accountability of educational services provided by school meeting the multiple stakeholders' expectations and needs	**World-Class School Movements:** To ensure the relevance and world-class standards of education to the multiple and sustainable developments of students and the society for the future in globalization
Role of Leadership	**Internal Leadership** with focus on internal improvements for achieving planned goals	**Interface Leadership** with focus on competition in the market and satisfaction of stakeholders	**Future Leadership** with focus on facilitating multiple and sustainable developments of students, teachers and the school
Related Leadership Concepts	- Instructional Leadership - Curriculum Leadership - Structural Leadership - Human Leadership - Micro-Political Leadership	- Strategic Leadership - Environmental/ Community Leadership - Public Relations Leadership - Brand Leadership	- Triplization Leadership - Multi-level Learning Leadership - Sustainable Development Leadership - Paradigm Shift Leadership
Strategic Concerns in Leadership	- How can the internal processes including learning, teaching, and management be organized technically well to deliver the planned knowledge, skills and values? - How can the delivery of knowledge and skills from teachers and curriculum to students be ensured through the practical improvement of schooling, teaching, and learning? - How can the school environment and teachers' teaching be practically and technically improved and developed in a given time period to meet the bureaucratic expectations? - How can students progress well in the planned curriculum and achieve at a higher standard in the public examinations? - How can the internal process be operationally changed to maximize the use of allocated resources?	- How should the school position itself and ensure its provision of services competitive in the education market? - How can the performance of teaching and the outcomes of learning meet the stakeholders' expectations and needs well? - How can the education services be ensured accountable to the public and stakeholders through various types of packaging, monitoring and reporting? - How can the school expand its influence on its interface and stakeholders to ensure support to its survival and development through activities of branding, marketing, partnership, and public relations? - How can more external resources and stronger network be achieved to support the school?	- How can the school make paradigm shifts in learning, teaching & management possible towards globalization, localization and individualization? - How can the school maximize students' learning opportunities through IT environment, networking, and paradigm shifts in teaching and schooling? - How can the school facilitate & sustain students' self-learning as potentially lifelong? - How can students' ability to globalize, localize and individualize their own learning be well developed? - How can students' contextualized multiple intelligence be continuously well developed? - How can various types of intellectual resources be achieved globally and locally to support world-class learning?

2nd Order Research with Multiple Paradigms: In ongoing education reforms in the Region, the practice and development of school leadership in reality may be diverse, involving more than one paradigm. It would be interesting to apply 2nd order research involving two or three paradigms to investigate the fundamental differences in school leadership and compare the major leadership characteristics between school leaders whose schools are in different stages or contexts of education development. The comparative studies of school leadership locally, regionally, and internationally across the three paradigms may provide a much broader and deeper perspective to understand the dynamics and related key features of school leadership. Also, the research involving a full range of the key concepts of internal leadership, interface leadership and future leadership may yield a more comprehensive picture to understand the complexities of educational reform and leadership and the findings may be more sophisticated and powerful to inform leadership practice and policy formulation for the new paradigm of learning. Up to now, investigation of school leadership by multiple paradigms is a completely new area yet to be explored in research.

2nd Order Research on Paradigm Shift: The paradigm shift of school leadership from one wave to another wave involves not only the technical or operational changes but also the ideological and cultural changes at both individual and system levels. It is quite complicated and not automatic. How can school leaders change their original patterns of thinking and practice from the first or second wave paradigm towards the third wave paradigm for new learning? What are the major conditions or driving forces for such kind of paradigm shift possible and successful? Why? What are the major characteristics and best practices of paradigm shift process in leadership in the Asia-Pacific Region?

In addition to paradigm shift in leadership, how can school leaders facilitate paradigm shift in learning, teaching and management among students, teachers and stakeholders successfully towards the third wave? What are the major problems in the process of leading paradigm shift in education in schools? What are the major conceptual and operational differences between the transformational leadership and paradigm shift leadership in research? .... All these or similar questions are in fact proposing an unexplored new area for paradigm shift research in the Asia-Pacific in coming years.

We should build up the new capacity for investigating these new research areas: 2nd order research with multiple paradigms of school leadership as well as paradigm shifts in conceptualization and practice of leadership in the Region.

Conclusions

From the above discussion, the conclusions of this speech can be summarized as below:

1. We should contribute to the fast developments of the Asia-Pacific Region in the coming 10 to 20 years. To support these developments and benefit over 26 m teachers and 500m students with the leverage effect of school leadership, we should enhance the leadership capacity of school leaders for education change and development with the comprehensive research-based knowledge in the Region;

2. We should build up new capacity for school leadership research and development in the Region. This new research capacity should be relevant to the cultural contexts of Asia-Pacific Region and contribute to the development of Asia-Pacific paradigms of leadership and change in education. It can promote 2nd order leadership research involving multi-levels, multi-domains, multi-disciplines and longitudinal impacts of leadership and change in education. In particular, this new research capacity can apply multiple paradigms of school leadership and articulate to the paradigm shifts in research and development of leadership in the Region; and

3. We should create synergy and network for leadership research and development in the Region. Given the challenges from the complexities of 2nd order research on leadership and change in education, the efforts for building research capacity should be much benefited from the synergy of creating critical mass of multi-disciplinary research expertise in different parts of the Region. Therefore, we should develop a leadership research network for international collaboration and synergy of the key R&D institutions, organizations and research teams across the Region and beyond.

The launch of the Asia-Pacific Centre for Leadership and Change as well as the Asia Leadership Roundtable is in fact representing the new initiatives and commitments of the Hong Kong Institute of Education and many R&D organizations and researchers to building capacity of school leadership research and development for the future of the Asia-Pacific Region. (see Figure 5)

Figure 5: International Network, Collaboration & Synergy for Building Capacity of School Leadership R&D in AP Region
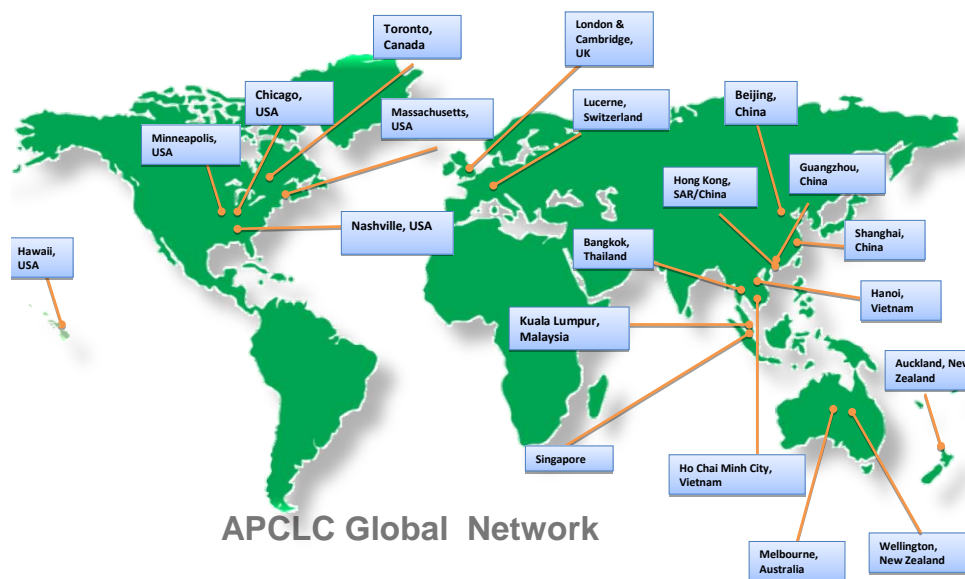
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