

The Changing Academy – The Changing Academic Profession
in International Comparative Perspective 19

Gerard A. Postiglione
Jisun Jung *Editors*

The Changing Academic Profession in Hong Kong



Springer

The Changing Academy – The Changing Academic Profession in International Comparative Perspective 19

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The landscape of higher education has in recent years undergone significant change. This has been particular the case for research training, academic life, employment, working conditions and entrepreneurial activities of universities around the globe. The academy is expected to be more professional in teaching, more productive in research and more entrepreneurial in everything. Some of the changes involved have raised questions about the attractiveness of an academic career for today's graduates. At the same time, knowledge has come to be identified as the most vital resource of contemporary societies.

The Changing Academy series examines the nature and extent of the changes experienced by the academic profession. It aims to address these changes from an international comparative perspective, focusing at both the higher education system level as well as the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in particular. It explores both the reasons for and the consequences of these changes.

The series considers the implications of the changes for the attractiveness of the academic profession as a career and for the ability of the academic community to contribute to the further development of knowledge societies and the attainment of national goals. It provides analyses on these matters drawing initially on available data-sets and qualitative research studies with special emphasis on the international studies of the Changing Academic Profession and the national surveys in STEM fields. Among the themes featured will be:

- Relevance of the academy's Work
- Enrolment, graduation and the institutional setting of STEM
- Research, development and technology policies with regards to STEM
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The Changing Academic Profession in Hong Kong

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Part I

Overview

Chapter 1

The Changing Academic Profession in Hong Kong: Challenges and Future

Gerard A. Postiglione and Jisun Jung

Keywords Academic profession • Hong Kong • Academic freedom • Institutional autonomy • Internationalization

Hong Kong's academic profession is nested within one of the world's most densely populated urban centers, which that is also a special administration region of China. One English medium university stood alone for over 50 years until mass schooling led to the establishment of a Chinese medium university in 1964. The two universities became elite training grounds for civil servants, business leaders, and professionals. By 1981, only two per cent of the relevant age group occupied a university place. This grew to eight per cent by 1989, when an outflow of talent led to a doubling of university places by 1994 (UGC 1996). The number of publically funded universities increased to seven by 1997, and eight by 2016 with the addition of the Education University of Hong Kong. An open university was established that has since become self-funded, and the first private college was elevated to university status. Table 1.1 presents an overview of eight public universities in 2015–6, when full-time academic staff numbered over 25,500.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, knowledge economics, financial retrenchment, and mass higher education came to dominate policy discourse. In 2004 the University Grants Committee called for a rethinking of its university strategy in a report entitled “*To Make a Difference: To Move with the Times*”:

We need home-grown graduates who have a strong sense of belonging, and a strong sense of identity as being a part of Hong Kong. At the same time it is also important to nurture a core of local faculty who give stability, local character, and cultural and intellectual rootedness to local universities, and engage themselves heavily with the local community. Their social and public role is vital to the development of a civil society and the quality of life (UGC 2004).

Despite its short history and small size, Hong Kong's universities are at the forefront of the region in terms of quality. Five of its ten universities were ranked in the

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Table 1.1 Public universities (2015/16)

	Number of students: full time (part time)					Number of academic staff	Grants (\$m) 2014/15
	SD	Ug	Tpg	RPg	Total	Full time	Total recurrent grants
City University of Hong Kong	913	12,423	53	807 (2)	14,196 (2)	2943	2064.5
Baptist University		6515	13 (214)	277	6805 (214)	1800	1036.0
Lingnan University		2532		76	2608	471	404.3
Chinese University of Hong Kong		16,408	364 (337)	1976	18,748 (337)	5745	4006.0
Education University of Hong Kong	596 (416)	3625 (1019)	159 (367)	38	4418 (1803)	1227	719.6
Polytechnic University	2219 (12)	14,388	13	713	17,333 (12)	4127	2646.8
Hong Kong University of Science and Technology		9005		1386	10,391	2681	2152.5
The University of Hong Kong		15,817	520 (232)	2084 (2)	18,421 (234)	5573	4047.5
Total	3728 (428)	80,713 (1019)	1122 (1149)	7356 (4)	92,919 (2601)	24,566	17,077.2

Source: University Grant Committee

Student Enrolment (Headcount) of UGC-funded Programmes by University, Level of Study, in 2015/16

Staff Number (Headcount) in Academic Departments of UGC-funded Universities by University, 2015/16

Grants for UGC-funded Institutions for 2013/14 and 2014/15

Notes: 1. *SD* sub-degree, *Ug* undergraduate, *TPg* taught postgraduate, *RPg* research postgraduate

2. The figures on recurrent grants and matching grants refer to the financial year of institutions from July to June

world's top 200 by the Times Higher Education and two were ranked in the top 50 (THE 2016–7). Several factors explain such success. First, universities enjoy a high degree of *autonomy*. Government, through the University Grants Committee, provides overall direction and steering, but the universities have almost complete internal autonomy and self-management. Second, universities are generally *governed effectively*. Internationally standard governance arrangements emphasize control by the academics, while at the same time strong administrative leadership. There is neither endless academic bickering, nor highly autocratic administrators. Decision making is more participative and transparent and academic freedom and information

access are unfettered. Third, *English dominates*. English is the medium, although both English and Chinese (the Cantonese dialect but also Mandarin) are used at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, to reflect its name. This means that Hong Kong's universities are immediately in the mainstream of global science and scholarship. Most publications produced are in English, although in recent years Chinese publications have increased as Hong Kong academics have begun to take advantage of the impact won by publishing in the massive academic landscape on the Chinese mainland. Fourth, *Internationalism* is still a key aspect of academic life. Most of the top academics have doctorates earned overseas, and many go on to academic and administrative posts in overseas universities. No other region in Asia has better access to international scholarly books and publications and there is no censorship of the internet. Top scholars and scientists, including Nobel laureates, are invited to lecture, and academics have ample opportunities to attend international conferences. Leaders in academic fields from around the world play a role in external assessment of research grant applications and teaching programs. Fifth, hiring, promotion, and tenure are *performance based and quite competitive*. Sixth, *universities appoint notable presidents*. To sustain its rise in the global rankings, Hong Kong ensures that globally respected scholars and scientists are the ones that are in positions of authority at their universities (Altbach and Postiglione 2012).

As the landscape of Hong Kong higher education has undergone change, so have the backgrounds, specializations, expectations and work roles of academic staff. After a review of the embedded drivers, this chapter focuses on how changes of higher education have affected academic work.

1.1 Drivers: Economic Globalization, National Mission, and the Human Resource Brain Race

1.1.1 Economic Globalization

Market competition has long been a sacred part of the Hong Kong's way of life (Lau 1982; Lau et al. 1999). The Chinese mainland's transition to a socialist market economy has reinforced Hong Kong's economic philosophy and its effort to link improvements in higher education to the marketplace (WEF 2006; Tse and Lee 2016). As cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou came to bear down on Hong Kong's economic prowess, educational reforms took on a new urgency:

If recently launched educational reforms have the intended effect of producing a more flexible, creative, and skilled workforce, Hong Kong will have a fighting chance to keep its vaunted position as China's international window over a longer time period (Panitchpadki and Clifford 2002).

The drivers that affected Hong Kong's universities included the transfer of manufacturing to the hinterland over the border into the Chinese mainland and a transition to a knowledge-based service economy. It is within this context that Hong Kong

imported a more managerial model of higher education to sustain it through the economic slowdown of 1997 to 2005 (Jao 2001). About the same time it also began to import talented Chinese mainland academic talent via universities in the United States of America, Canada, England, and Australia.

1.1.2 National Mission: From Bridge to Window to Hub

China's reform and opening to the outside world that began in December of 1979 gradually diminished Hong Kong's long held position a bridge for China's educational exchange with the outside world (Postiglione 2005). The first Chinese to study in America was Yung Wing, who attended the Hong Kong's Morrison Education Society School before earning a degree from Yale University in 1854 (Ting et al. 2003). The first group of students sent to America in 1872 included Chow Shouson, Liang Tun Yen, and others who had attended school in Hong Kong. Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the Father of Modern China, studied at the Hong Kong Medical College (later to become the University of Hong Kong). Throughout the rest of the twentieth century, thousands followed, including Daniel Chee Tsui, a graduate of Hong Kong Pui Ching Middle School who was awarded a Nobel Prize in Physics 1998, and Charles Kao, graduate of Hong Kong's St. Joseph's School who was awarded a Nobel Laureate in Physics in 2009.

Hong Kong's educational exchanges became an integral part of the unprecedented transformation of South China. Strengthened by its overseas Chinese links, Hong Kong began an economic integration with Guangdong's Pearl River Delta that continues to this day, supporting Hong Kong's role in trade and transport, banking and finance, travel and tourism, communication and diplomacy (Kwok and So 1995). The tradition of studying abroad added to Hong Kong's remarkable ability to attract human capital.

The high proportion of international academic staff, many of whom are trilingual (English, Cantonese, and Mandarin) and multicultural during the expansion of the university system helped Hong Kong refine its bridge role to become China's window on the world, a place where knowledge, skills, and alternative ideas from the outside world were on display. Hong Kong continued its own educational exchanges with other countries, even while it still facilitated international educational exchanges for the Chinese mainland. Its cross-cultural sophistication and easy access to Mainland sources permitted it to provide broad perspectives, reliable advice, and penetrating analyses of China's reforms. This role became integrated with Hong Kong's transition to a knowledge economy and came to constitute the nucleus of its vision for cross-Pacific academic exchanges.

Thus, Hong Kong capitalized on its intimate knowledge of China, international links, communication infrastructure, and cultural affinity with the mainland. It remains a key center for interpreting China's reform, but also for building mutual understanding between China and the rest of the world. In this respect, its universities play a central role. The University of Hong Kong (HKU) was established with

the mission to advance China's modernization, a mission that continues to guide its academic work. Its academic profession functions within an atmosphere of traditions, values, and practices unlike their counterparts in the Chinese mainland.

Finally, Hong Kong's universities have also been involved at various levels in the Chinese mainland's transition from elite to mass higher education, the mainland's aspiration for its top universities to achieve world class status, and in the establishment of joint degrees and other academic joint ventures.

1.1.3 The Brain Race for Human Resources

Hong Kong's future came to be viewed as depending heavily on its human resources – the skills of its people in such fields as financial management, law, science and technology, tourism, the management of trade and business, and related fields (Chen and Ng 2001). From the 1980s onward, its quick-profit business community chose to rely more on the approaching reunion with China for keeping the economy charging ahead. Rather than following the path of the other three Asian Tigers (Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea) which gained success by investing early in higher technology, Hong Kong chose not to make the investment. Without resource extraction or heavy industries, Hong Kong has come to rely on its world-class innovative universities to remain globally competitive.

Another special challenge for Hong Kong was to keep abreast of the rapidly developing and improving universities in other parts of China (Zhou 2006; Li 2005). With the generous support of government's excellence initiatives, known as projects 211 and 985, research universities on the Chinese mainland rose quickly in the global rankings. Meanwhile Hong Kong's percentage of GDP for research and development, a mere 0.7%, paled in comparison to that of the Chinese mainland's 2.5%. While Hong Kong's universities risk losing ground to their Mainland counterparts, Hong Kong also benefits greatly from robust university growth on the mainland and the proximity to, and unique relationships with mainland universities (Postiglione 1998). As university presidents from around the world visit China's top tier universities, they cannot help noticing the tremendous sums of money being funneled toward these campuses (Ministry of Education 2004). They also hear a great deal about new measures to raise academic quality and make the universities more competitive. Still, Mainland Chinese universities need much further development to build an advanced academic culture focused on research, collaborative work, meritocratic advancement, and top quality teaching and consultancy (Li 2006, Altbach and Postiglione 2006).

Hong Kong's universities have built closer relationships with universities on the Chinese mainland, as well as more joint programs of academic cooperation and exchange with overseas universities. Most universities have a target of recruiting 20% of their undergraduate students from outside of Hong Kong, about then percent from the Chinese mainland and ten percent elsewhere. The undergraduate curriculum has been reformed to build problem solving and other soft skills, further commitment to community building, and a campus culture that is supported with initiatives to stress innovation and entrepreneurship.

1.2 Changing Academic Environment in Hong Kong

1.2.1 Governance, Management, and Academic Culture

Four factors came together within the short span of a few years to foster a rapid evolution in management style within Hong Kong. The first was the rapid expansion of higher education in the 1990s followed by consolidation measures aimed at preserving quality. The second factor was the end of colonial rule, a time when it became clear that “Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong” would necessitate a localization of management expertise. The third factor was the Asian economic crisis which had an enormous impact on spending when university budgets could no longer be taken for granted as had been the case for decades. Finally, the end of century discourse on university management provided a signal to academic staff globalization would increasingly drive changes in their working conditions and environment.

Nevertheless, Hong Kong’s top universities retained a competitive advantage. These included the predominant use of English in higher education instruction as well as the constantly improving standard of Chinese Mandarin. Academic freedom remained sufficiently well entrenched to have withstood several challenges. An international faculty with both Chinese and other foreign heritages was well integrated into the day-to-day operation of the universities, complementing the cosmopolitanism of local staff and their institutions. Transparency in administration and shared governance kept academic staff involved in major development planning and key decisions. Working conditions remained favorable by international standards, as did academic salaries. The Asian economic crisis that straddled the turn of the Century led to salary cuts and the introduction of a performance-based salary system. While tenured academic appointments are highly competitive and difficult to obtain in Hong Kong, there is a recognized academic career path and reasonable security of employment. Perhaps most important is the fact that both Hong Kong’s universities and its society function according to accepted international standards and have a commitment to excellence, meritocracy, and an openness to ideas and innovation.

There is a view that the main requirement for Hong Kong to maintain its competitive academic system is for society at all levels – including the universities themselves as well as the government and the public – to support the universities and recognize them as a central element of Hong Kong’s future. This means both adequate funding and attention to maintaining and strengthening Hong Kong’s distinctive academic culture.

1.2.2 Internationalism

The international marketplace has long been familiar to the Hong Kong business community. The meaning of internationalism in higher education has always been a tool to sharpen Hong Kong’s competitive edge both within China and

internationally. It has evolved gradually and become a key part of the infrastructure and identity. It is also generally accepted that the survival of Hong Kong's higher education system depends heavily upon its internationalism. This has not only meant having locally born academic staff with doctorates earned in English speaking countries, but also a high number of academic staff recruited from overseas.

International university partnerships have increased; something that is strengthened by Hong Kong's English medium higher education, its location within China, communications infrastructure, the safety and ease of transportation, experience with launching and hosting international study programs, a rich tradition of educational exchange, and an academic environment that protects academic freedom.

In the Carnegie Study of the International Academic Profession, eight in ten Hong Kong academics in 1993 thought that connections with scholars outside Hong Kong were very important to their professional work (Boyer et al. 1994; Postiglione 1996; Postiglione and Tang 1997). Most believed that in order to keep up with developments in their disciplines, they must read books and journals published outside Hong Kong (ranked only behind Russia and Israel), and in a 1999 follow-up study, almost 90% agreed. In 1993, more than eight in ten stated that institutions of higher education should do more to promote student and staff mobility from one country to another (76% agreed in the 1999 survey), and almost two-thirds responded that the curriculum at their institutions should be more international in focus.

According to the 2007–2008 survey data, the internationalization of Hong Kong academics remained remarkable in research activities. For instance, 60% responded that they were engaged in international research collaboration for last 3 years. This is the best among Asian countries—Mainland China (13%), Japan (24%), Korea (30%), and Malaysia (32%). The proportion of Hong Kong academics who have published with international co-authors is also third highest among academics in 19 countries surveyed in 2007. Almost half of Hong Kong academics published their research with foreign colleagues. Moreover, the proportion of Hong Kong academics who have published in a foreign country is higher (86%) than academics in any other higher education system (Table 1.2).

1.2.3 Pragmatic Adaptation to Changing Environment

As a small territory with an open society with longstanding international links and a pragmatic approach to business and commerce, Hong Kong has brought its high-cost public universities out of academic isolation and converted them from symbols of excellence to engines for economic survival, social development, and cultural vitality. Hong Kong business and commerce has long been noted for their pragmatism and quick adaptation to global markets. While certain sectors of the academy continued to operate in traditional discipline-driven patterns, the large majority of academic work patterns have become restructured by incentives that aim to reinvigorate the traditional mission by fostering more cross-disciplinary, cross-department, and cross-institutional cooperation.

Table 1.2 Internationalization of research activities: international comparison, 2007 (% yes)

	International collaboration	Co-authored with foreign colleagues	Published in a foreign country		International collaboration	Co-authored with foreign colleagues	Published in a foreign country
Canada	64	43	60	Australia	59	40	57
USA	33	24	30	Japan	24	31	42
Finland	70	45	73	Korea	30	28	53
Germany	50	45	67	Hong Kong	60	49	86
Italy	59	47	74	China	13	3	28
Netherlands	63	57	–	Malaysia	32	27	49
Norway	66	50	78	Argentina	47	29	61
Portugal	54	46	77	Brazil	28	19	45
UK	61	44	58	Mexico	35	28	53

Changes in the structure of academic work have become more closely intertwined with the survival and development needs of the Hong Kong as a Special Administrative Region of China (SAR). Teaching, research, service, and knowledge exchange address a broad array of challenges that include improving competitive trade relations, keeping pace with Mainland China's internationalization, preventing infectious diseases, preserving colonial architecture, reigning in the rising cost of health care, caring for an aging population, promoting civic leadership, minimizing cross border air pollution, ensuring more transparency in governance, engendering equal pay in the work place, and removing obstacles to innovative thinking within the school and university system.

While the Hong Kong Research Grants Council continued to invite research proposals on all topics, there came to be a preference for funding projects linked to Hong Kong's development. Moreover, the government's Central Policy Unit invites and funds research on a variety of specifically identified topics critical to Hong Kong's development, such as income inequality, youth delinquency, integrating new migrants, air quality, hybrid vehicles, land usage, etc. The management of universities became reprogrammed for increased relevance to these emerging global and local problems. In *Higher Education Relevance in the twenty-first century*, Michael Gibbons (1998) sets out a view familiar to those in Hong Kong higher education:

The main change, as far as universities are concerned, is that knowledge production and dissemination – research and teaching – are no longer self-contained activities, carried out in relative institutional isolation. They now involve interaction with a variety of other knowledge producers. In this situation, connections will increasingly involve the use of the potentialities of the new information and communication technologies.

Cross-institutional interaction has increased. This has been management driven by incentives for groups of academics to coordinate their academic activities across different universities. The RGC provided support for cross-institutional collaborative research to improve Hong Kong's competitive edge. This has brought scholars and scientists from around the world into a closer working relationship with Hong

Kong counterparts. The size of Hong Kong makes this particularly relevant. Hong Kong academic associations tend to have a small number of members in each field, but they do provide a forum that can bring specialists across all institutions together to sustain academic vitality. The changing university–society relationship permits more opportunities for knowledge exchange for universities and government/civic organizations to solve practical social problems ranging from transport infrastructure to school management, from legal challenges to world trade agreements, and from medical challenges ranging from infectious disease immunology to commercializing biotechnology.

Nevertheless, Hong Kong academic workers continued to wrestle with issues similar to those of academics in other systems. While on the one hand Hong Kong's localization of the academy and its management in the 1990s created a more pragmatic intellectual culture and work style that stressed greater relevance, it was also disadvantaged by the residual colonialism of a privileged academy with virtually guaranteed public funding. The resulting inertia and resistance to change lingered for some time. As higher education admissions began to expand amid rising costs, and as public involvement in educational issues rose, there was a necessity to rethink the management and finance of higher education. Members of the business community began to take a more proactive role in university affairs and models were borrowed from the corporate world to increase the management efficiency of Hong Kong's universities.

The still burning question is whether Hong Kong academics will move more toward the kind of self-censorship more common in other parts of China, or whether reforms on the Chinese mainland will bring academic culture more convergent with the best of the global academy. Like top tier universities elsewhere, Hong Kong's institutions have ensured that academic staff recruitment remain and continue to be increasingly internationally inclusive. This is less the case in Mainland universities, where most overseas hires are returnees. Others are hired but in fewer numbers and easily marginalized due to language and cultural differences. However, there are indications that China's universities are moving toward greater international integration while maintaining the strength and character of China's academic heritage.

The Hong Kong academy has maintained an open system of academic governance. However, further economic prosperity requires universities to be a driving force for innovation. Changes affecting the academic profession in China's two systems have been very much a function of global trends in higher education, such as the devolution of financial responsibility, and the new managerialism. Until the late 1980s, when Hong Kong was a two-university city, per unit costs were higher, but the scale of higher education was small. Staff costs account for a bulk of expenditure, and the public is increasingly conscious of getting value for money. Academic staff are exposed to annual assessment, and the pressure to produce increases year by year. In the international survey of the academic profession a higher proportion of Hong Kong academics than their counterparts agreed that decisions about resource allocation are performance based (Postiglione and Wang 2011).

The integration of Hong Kong's academics into the global academy has strengthened their values of academic autonomy and freedom. If academic traditions and