

teaching loads rather than to increased reliance on part-timers. This thinking ignores two facts. First, instructional hours vary with institutional mission. Faculty members spend more hours in class at two-year and bachelor's-degree-granting institutions than at comprehensive or research universities. Second, as teaching loads increase,

out-of-class instructional time diminishes. Improving the quality of instruction requires that institutions that have relied excessively on inadequately supported part-time appointments increase their proportion of full-time appointments and improve the support for and quality of their part-time appointees. ■

Academic Freedom in Hong Kong—Threats Inside and Out

Philip G. Altbach

Philip G. Altbach is Monan professor of higher education and director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College. He has been Onwell Fellow in the Faculty of Education at Hong Kong University.

In early July, academic freedom became front-page news in Hong Kong when Professor Robert Chung of Hong Kong University, a prominent pollster, accused the university's vice chancellor of pressuring him to stop conducting public opinion polls concerning the territory's chief executive. A special commission has been appointed to look into the charges and into academic freedom generally, and Hong Kong's academics, insecure following the accession to China in 1997, are feeling even more unhappy.

It may be useful to look at this crisis from an international perspective, since many of the issues facing Hong Kong's universities are common elsewhere. Hong Kong is in an unusual position. It is precariously balanced between the norms and values of the international academic community, where academic freedom is a central conviction, and the complex reality of its special "one country, two systems" status as a part of China. China has no commitment to academic freedom, and many in Hong Kong see Chinese political and cultural norms as gradually taking over.

Colonial Influences

Hong Kong University has its roots as a colonial institution. Established in 1911 by the British, its structures and values were from the beginning British. Until relatively recently, academic power was in the hands of expatriate senior professors. British authorities, especially in the latter period of colonial rule, permitted the university academic freedom and considerable autonomy, but the institution looked to Britain rather than to Hong Kong, or to Asia, for guidance. Even today, there is a complex relationship between the university and Hong Kong society.

Hong Kong academics are especially attuned to violations of academic freedom precisely because of their special political and societal circumstances. It is admirable that the academic community remains committed to the core values of the university. These very circumstances may, however, obscure other realities affecting higher education in Hong Kong—and worldwide.

Trends Affecting Higher Education

Many trends threaten not only the traditional values of academe, but may also be problematical for academic freedom. It is useful to discuss some of them, if only to show that Hong Kong is not the only place where the ideals of the university are in jeopardy.

Managerialism

Worldwide, the traditional control of the central elements of the university by the faculty is being diminished. In the name of efficiency and accountability, business practices imported from the corporate sector are coming to dominate the universities. Governance, the traditional term used to describe the uniquely participatory way that universities work, is being replaced by management. The academic staff has had essential responsibility for the curriculum, the admission of students and the award of degrees, and the hiring and promotion of professors, and usually dominated the decision-making bodies of the university. Increasingly, managers are taking control of the levers of power. This does not make the professors happy and may, in the long run, create academic institutions that have no core academic values.

Accountability and Autonomy

Simply stated, traditional autonomy—the ability of the professoriate to control the classroom, the curriculum, and the overall conditions of academic work—is being severely constrained by accountability—the idea that those paying the costs of higher education should have the right to determine how funds should be spent. This often extends to research—professors once were able to determine their own research priorities and often to obtain funding for them. Now, funds are increasingly allocated by corporations that demand specific results. This creates problems not only for the future of basic research (which does not yield immediately usable products) but for the academic freedom to pursue research topics.

Diminishing Power

The academic profession is, simply put, losing its once dominating power over the university. Managers are making

more decisions, and external agencies, from the University Grants Committee to legislatures, are taking on roles that the professoriate once had.

Fiscal Constraints

Worldwide, universities are facing financial problems. Governments have cut back on funding for higher education, and students and their families have been asked to pay more of the cost. This has resulted in deteriorating academic salaries and declining conditions of academic work. In Hong Kong, these pressures are much less severe than elsewhere.

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These, and other, trends are not happy ones for the academic profession at outset the new millennium. Yet, they are realities with which the professoriate everywhere must contend. An outsider might argue that academics in Hong Kong enjoy comparatively good conditions. Hong Kong academic salaries are reputed to be among the highest in the world, especially when one takes into account tax rates. Working conditions, despite problems, remain comparatively good. Academic facilities, including libraries and laboratories, especially in the top institutions, remain world-class—or close to it. When compared to other Asian countries, including Japan, most Hong Kong academics enjoy favorable conditions.

Why, then, the protests and the general feeling of malaise among Hong Kong academics? Part of the problem is a lack of confidence in the political future of the territory—a factor that no doubt exacerbates every perceived threat to academic freedom. The unfamiliarity of the ruling elite in Hong Kong with the norms and values of a university and the lack of constraints for violating these norms may also contribute. The fact that Hong Kong academic institutions are probably more “Western” than “Asian” makes them more sensitive to external factors than similar institutions in other Asian countries.

In a sense, Hong Kong’s academics are swimming against two powerful currents—the current of worldwide managerialism and academic bureaucratism, and the current of Asian state domination of academe. It is all the more impressive that the academic community has stood up to these powerful pressures and that the civil society in Hong Kong has made their cause a topic of concern and struggle. ■

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Mixed Policy Signals and Mixed Results in American Higher Education

Arthur M. Hauptman

Arthur M. Hauptman is a public policy consultant based in Arlington, Virginia specializing in higher education finance issues. This article is adapted from a speech he gave as part of the J. Donald Monan SJ Symposium on Higher Education held at Boston College in spring 2000. E-mail: <hauptman@erols.com>.

Higher education in the United States has a curious combination of characteristics. It has among the highest participation rates in the world, but lack of access remains the primary concern expressed by many policymakers. Degree completion rates in the United States rank in the middle to below average among industrialized nations, yet education attainment is among the highest in the world. The United States has many of the best universities and students in the world, but the quality of the average American university and student may be mediocre when compared to universities in many other countries.

Some of these seeming contradictions are not that hard to explain. As countries move to a massified system of higher education in which half or more of the age cohort continues their education beyond high school, they will see a decline in both the overall persistence and the quality of the average student as more students enroll than in more elite systems. In this regard, it would be surprising to see both participation and quality to be sustained at very high levels. Basic arithmetic dictates that high attainment and modest persistence are possible only if participation rates are high.

But this curious combination of access and quality is also a function of some particular aspects of the American approach, including: the tremendous diversity of the American higher education system, the amount of resources devoted to it, and the lack of an overall national strategy for dealing with issues facing the system.

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