Chapter 6
Freedom to Excel: Performativity, Accountability, and Educational Sovereignty in Hong Kong's Academic Capitalism

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6.1 Introduction

Historically, professors were persecuted when they expressed views or "uncomfortable truths" that religious authorities, states, or other powerful status groups disliked. Therefore, academic freedom is an issue which should be safeguarded and defended. The definition of modern academic freedom was established when the first research university began operating in Berlin, Germany, in 1810. According to Altbach (2015), academic freedom, in the first instance, referred to the understanding that professors had freedom to decide what they could teach in classrooms and how to do research in direct areas of expertise. The protection of such academic freedom did not, however, cover expression of opinions outside of a professor's own academic expertise. In nineteenth-century Germany, academics who expressed political views in opposition to the ruling elite, who were socialists, or who dissented in other ways were often punished and deprived of academic appointments.

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A more comprehensive version of academic freedom was developed when the American Association of University Professors broadened its definition to include expressing opinions on topics outside direct academic areas. In terms of academic freedom in Germany and America, it not only protected professors as members of the academic community but also defended democratic governance in the academy. As professors were protected from being dismissed through a tenure system, they neither needed to worry about their dismissal for their disagreement with the ruling class in their research, teaching, or other views, nor worry about punishment due to dissenting university leadership on issues concerning academic governance or policy. The broadened view of academic freedom, stemming from German and American academic professions, has been adopted by many higher education communities worldwide which commit to the ideal of academic freedom in their scholarly traditions (see also Chap. 1 on this point). During its long history, academic freedom has been contested through debates and tensions outside of the academic profession rather than within professorial communities (Altbach 2015).

In the case of Hong Kong, when the issue of academic freedom is broached, educational sovereignty is a notion which is debated in the discourse. The debates have become increasingly uneasy and confrontational in this entrepreneurial city governed under the "One Country, Two Systems" political arrangement. Educational sovereignty stands for the authority of a jurisdiction to govern independently the domestic issues of education by exercising the highest executive power on legislation, administration, as well as enforcement of education-related laws (Pan 2009). More importantly, sovereignty of a jurisdiction is embodied in educational sovereignty. It refers to the final right of decision-making on specific education issues. Once academic freedom is being threatened, some activist citizens usually come to its defense to safeguard freedom of speech as a core value of Hong Kong. Some groups of professorial activists like Scholars' Alliance for Academic Freedom in Hong Kong express concerns that they gain more support from members outside the academic profession than members from the inside. At times, when academic freedom is endangered, it is the student activist groups that come to its defense, often facilitated and supported by the mass media and social media (Tang 2015).

Academic freedom and institutional autonomy are changing socio-political constructions shaped and interpreted by various stakeholders in Hong Kong's political development, especially in the context of greater integration of Hong Kong and mainland China and the increasing oversight of university management by the government (Law 2019). Government interference of academic affairs and university institutional management is not incidental but offers clues about a tendency toward a restrictive regime of control over higher education governance in Hong Kong (Chan and Kerr 2016).

At the micro level of politics, democracy, and education, people usually broaden the definition of academic freedom, while governments or administrators usually narrow the scope of the notion. For instance, some people believe academic freedom basically includes everything essential to democratic ideals, while governments define academic freedom within limits to what can and cannot be taught, researched, and published (Altbach 2015; Chan and Kerr 2016).

In fact, since Hong Kong's sovereignty was returned to China in 1997, there has been widespread concern over the preservation of university institutional autonomy and academic freedom in this Chinese city. Apart from a number of significant incidents prompting controversies over government interference in academic work, there has been the rise of managerialism, where collegial decision-making processes are taken over by managerial processes based on a corporate rationality (Lee 2011; Schugurensky 2003). However, Lee (2011) claims that there is a good merge in Hong Kong universities of managerial values, highlighted by institutional mission and competent leadership, and academic values, which include emphases on academic freedom and collegiality. What underpins the debates and discourses within and without the academic profession is the question of whether academic freedom is essential for the making of excellent, world-class universities.

Based on the context introduced above, this chapter examines key issues surrounding changes in the academic profession of Hong Kong, including academic excellence, accountability, and educational sovereignty against the backdrop of academic capitalism. Analyses and discussion are based on in-depth interviews with academic professionals and postgraduate students in a leading university in this Asian entrepreneurial city which has inherited a predominantly Western academic culture. We also use newspaper reports to supplement our analysis of the latest trends in Hong Kong's rapidly changing academic profession. We focus on the way academic freedom is understood, expected, and practiced when pressure for performance dominates the everyday tasks of academic life which is increasingly commercialized. The chapter takes universities in Hong Kong as a case study and argues that academic freedom is under siege by performativity as a means to a political end, escalating intrusions from diversified stakeholders, and "mainlandization."

6.2 Conceptual Framework

This chapter borrows the conceptual framework of Tang (2014a) on academic capitalism in Greater China. In particular, it discusses a performance-driven academic profession and the ways in which performativity and accountability erode educational sovereignty. Academic capitalism refers to the forces that restructure the higher education sector into the "academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime" (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004) through neoliberal governance, institutional policies and practices, funding mechanisms, regulation of the academic profession, and new/entrepreneurial organizations which integrate the university into the state and market systems. Apart from the institutional aspect, academic capitalism is also concerned about the changing behavior of academic professionals in this capitalist knowledge/learning regime, and the market and market-like actions by other stakeholders in the higher education sector. The creation of new circuits of knowledge that link higher education to political economy may undermine self-governance of the academic profession and endanger academic freedom (Slaughter 2011).

6.2.1 *Performativity and Pro-competition Higher Education Policies*

As an example of East Asian capitalist modernity, Hong Kong's economic success lies in the way in which economic freedom is accentuated. In a quest for freedom to compete and excel, migrants are attracted to this land of opportunity where performativity is the lifeblood of the city's ethos. Its value system is predominantly shaped by the capitalist logic which features a free-market, open competitiveness, efficiency, and capital accumulation (Hamilton 1999; Lee 2008; Lung 2006).

Hong Kong's economic development preceded the development of its higher education sector. In higher education, the concern for research performativity – and the research tradition at large – emerged in Hong Kong academia in the 1990s when the universities started to respond to the globalization of higher education. Before that, the colonial city usually relied on overseas countries, especially the colonizer, the United Kingdom, for research and knowledge on government and industrial needs. Until the massification trend in the 1990s (Lo and Tang 2017; Tang 2015), Hong Kong's higher education was elitist, with only two universities offering higher education for bright high school graduates. When the higher education sector began expanding, the entrepreneurial mode of governance in alignment with the operational logic of capitalism (Slaughter and Cantwell 2012) was adopted in university management. Global competitivenss, cost-effectiveness and public accountability are central to institutional agendasetting and pursuit of excellence (UGC 1996). Managerialism was generally embraced by Hong Kong academics (Lee 2011) who shared a culture of consensus (Postiglione 2002).

Theoretically and legally, Hong Kong universities are entitled to institutional autonomy according to their own institutional ordinances. The Hong Kong government does not directly implement higher education policies in a top-down manner; rather, it is done through a buffer organization called the University Grants Committee of Hong Kong (UGC). However, this chapter argues that institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and educational sovereignty are affected, infringed, and redefined in some subtle and problematic ways, against the backdrop of globalization of academic capitalism and performance-driven policies.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, neoliberalism has been penetrating many aspects of academic life in Hong Kong. With the freedom to compete, excel, and perform, academic professionals are tasked with producing world-class research and attaining institutional prestige in global rankings. Only a select few are recognized through the awarding of competitive research grants, promotion of academic rank, or professorial endowment. In addition to financing higher education bodies, a more significant duty of the government is to formulate and regulate pro-competition policies. The narrative of "value for money" (Slaughter and Cantwell 2012) is instigated, circulated, and reproduced in government and institutional policies, resulting in the indoctrinating of neoliberal ideology into the funding mechanisms of research and academic programs, as well as into the everyday life of Hong Kong's academic profession.

The logic of performativity as an attribute of capitalism means attaining "the best possible input/output equation" (Lyotard 1984: 46). Its extension into education brings a mode of thinking whereby tertiary institutions build optimal operation, performance orientation and commit to competition in the higher education system (Locke 2015; Lyotard 1984; Roberts 2013). The idea of optimizing performance in tertiary education teaching and research – which needs "means of proof" – assumes outcomes are "always calculable" (Lyotard 1984). When the emphasis on performativity influences evaluating a professor's research and teaching, there is a set of criteria for publication assessment, funding measurement, and teaching evaluation. In essence, the setup of calculable performance criterion urging efficiency and competition creates an "academic dystopia" in institutional procedures and priorities (Roberts 2013). Academic dystopia is commonly understood as the circumstances in which the academy becomes no longer a community that desires truth-seeking and the pursuit of justice.

Within the academic capitalist framework, individual intellectuals and academic units attain resources based on their own performance rather than on their membership in the academic system. Insomuch that it is essential for a capitalist economy, competition makes global higher education work. Not unlike other higher education jurisdictions which are profoundly affected by the globalization of academic capitalism, Hong Kong universities function more and more as economic organizations. Economizing academic life (Bok 2003) is the entrepreneurial response of Hong Kong universities and the academic profession to the rise of global academic capitalism.

6.2.2 Accountability

All first-tier universities in Hong Kong are public-funded institutions under the auspices of the University Grants Committee. Apart from excellence and cost-effectiveness, public accountability is viewed as vital in how the UGC steers higher education in Hong Kong (UGC 1996). Hong Kong universities are not only obligated with accountability to the general public; they are also expected to be accountable to sponsoring bodies and donors. Accountability justifiably makes sense, especially in a crisis of austerity and amid a risk society. Embedded within Confucian managerial culture which values reciprocity, Hong Kong's higher education governance ensures that accountability has a unique function.

In the face of the Asian financial crisis in 1997, austerity imposed by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government further justified and intensified its elevation of entrepreneurial governance in the higher education sector. The public-funded universities, as first-tier institutions, were directed by the government to pursue international excellence (Postiglione and Tang 2008), proving their competitive edge and demonstrating accountability for the public money spent on higher education (Tung 1997). In those times of austerity, Hong Kong employers and the local community questioned the quality of university graduates and the

cost-effectiveness of the educational returns of massified higher education (Postiglione and Mak 1997, cited by Tang 2014a).

When the twenty-first century arrived with a global call for developing knowledge economies, Hong Kong's universities were facing the challenge of serious funding cuts from the Hong Kong government. The Hong Kong funding of the higher education sector experienced a 4% cut when education reform was launched in 2000. It was followed by a further 10% budget cut for all public-funded institutions in 2003/04 (when the SARS epidemic seriously affected Hong Kong's society and economy). In the policy narrative, the government, via the UGC, stated that focused support was to serve as an incentive for Hong Kong universities in their strategic quest for excellence at the highest international levels (Sutherland 2002, 6–7; cited by Tang 2014a). Marketization was introduced into the operation of academic programs, with a massive expansion of self-financed postgraduate programs. Non-local students began to be enrolled in self-financed postgraduate programs, and those enrolled in government-funded undergraduate programs and postgraduate programs now comprised only 4% of the total student population. Market ideology was also applied to human resources management by delinking the salary scale of public-funded higher education institutions from the civil service. This delinking offered higher education administrations the flexibility of hiring staff on contract terms.

Instead of widespread resistance, Hong Kong universities applied the culture of consensus (Postiglione 2002), embraced this "new reality" (Clark 2000; Tang 2013), and entrepreneurially adapted to the changes and challenges. The president of a first-tier research university recommended that Hong Kong public universities should diversify funding from external sources by focusing more on applied research and enhance networks with business corporations and industries (Mok 2001; Tang 2014a). Paradoxically, although one aspect of the policy agenda was aimed at strengthening public accountability, knowledge, and education in Hong Kong, universities became more "capitalized" (Etzkowitz et al. 1998) and less devoted to the public good (Marginson 2011; Tang 2014a). Having entered the globalization of academic capitalism, Hong Kong's higher education institutions are positioned in an increasingly open-market framework, with ever-quickening competition and intensifying cross-border capitalist academic activities.

6.2.3 Academic Capitalism and Educational Sovereignty Eroded

Academic freedom and institutional autonomy are the cornerstone ideals of a vibrant, prolific, and healthy higher learning institution. Both of these ideals include the concept of educational sovereignty which guarantees academics their right to decide what they research and teach; how knowledge is created, disseminated, and applied; who can be members of the departmental/disciplinary colleges; as well as what kind of students can be admitted. Free from the demands of laymen and the control and censorship of administrators, academics should be entitled to

professional autonomy in its own right to a great extent. An academic appointment is not merely an occupation but a calling, and the calling of scholars should transform and transcend self-interest into ideal-regarding interests and public good (Clark 2008, cited by Hao 2015). A university should be a community with shared governance which safeguards academic autonomy, enables knowledge advancement and reinforces academic identity, and, from time to time, refreshes the academic calling (Hao 2015).

Protection of academic freedom is enshrined in Article 137 of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's Basic Law (Currie et al. 2006; Postiglione 2006; Tang 2014a). On the basis of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, Hong Kong's higher education institutions enjoy the capacity to use recurrent grants at their discretion.

However, managerial practices are enforcing efficiency and effectiveness and legitimatizing the imperative of university managerialism. The ideology of academic capitalism leads to a redefinition and new understanding about the meaning and practice of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. What constitutes the "superstructure" of an academic enterprise is the very ideology of academic capitalism (Tang 2014a). Through the "social technologies" of policy narrative and many a "scientific" measurement of performativity (Slaughter and Cantwell 2012), the academic capitalist ideology redefines academic excellence as a global academic game of excelling in the accumulation of productivity, prestige, and profits. In everyday circumstances of academic life, academic freedom is more often practiced as the freedom to perform, compete and excel in a liberal academic system, than fulfilling the higher calling of scholars to speak truth to power. Tang (2014a: 210) argues:

> Since the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s, competitiveness discourses gained currency – through wide circulation – among policymakers, elite circles of business leaders, university administrators, the mass media, and the general public. According to Slaughter and Cantwell (2012), human capital and competitiveness discourses justify and normalize neoliberal changes in higher education, which utilize education as an investment for economic returns rather than for social good and social justice. The concerned narratives and discourses further elaborate and articulate the ideology of academic capitalism through "social technologies" of various ranking methods of "world-class universities," citation indices of journal publications, and audit exercises for quality assurance. The circuits of production and reproduction of such narratives and discourses reveal that the prevalent economic culture forms, transpires, and reinforces the rudiments of academic capitalist ideology, in line with the existing political agenda and ideology. Corporate leaders, in capitalist economies in particular, are the key players in the initiation, articulation, and advocacy in the above-mentioned competitiveness narratives. The corporate elites, despite being external to the academic profession, are commonly on the board of trustees or regents, and they phase in corporate-like governance of higher education to universities' "executive management" (Slaughter and Cantwell 2012). . . . The ideology of academic capitalism blinds the members of academia to the contradictions in capitalist society, and to their mission to pursue social justice for the people.

Apart from the symbiotic relationship of global academic capitalism, entrepreneurial universities, and local governing and corporate elites, one variable that affects the educational sovereignty of Hong Kong's higher education institutions is

the powerful trend of "mainlandization" or "intranationalization" in the governance of this city. According to Hao (2015), authoritarianism is prevalent as "the order of the day" in mainland China (see also Chaps. 4 and 5). Increasingly the ethos and practices in the Hong Kong SAR government and political arena are affected by the mainland's authoritarianism, and Hong Kong's political practices are starting to resemble that of the mainland. Structurally speaking, the Chief Executive is the Chancellor of all public universities in Hong Kong, and all university presidents are presumably under the management of the Chief Executive. In the past, the Chief Executive (and Governor in colonial Hong Kong) only performed their duties in a symbolic manner, but the third Chief Executive (2012 to 2017) exercised his authority by intervening in the governance of individual universities, including appointing pro-government members onto the University Council. The executive-led practices, which are also supported by the Basic Law, enable the Chief Executive to intervene in educational affairs for the sake of strengthening the national sovereignty. Although more time is needed to confirm the observation, the current Chief Executive and her governance team seem to follow suit in this trend of executive-led practices. In the name of "public accountability," the government can intervene in educational sovereignty in favor of the national government's agenda which impedes the development of academic professionalism.

On the one hand, the mainland's ever-prospering innovative industries demand new knowledge, which incentivizes cross-border knowledge transfers from Hong Kong, for instance, via the neighboring city of Shenzhen (Sharif and Tang 2014). Yet on the other hand, mainland China's and Hong Kong's higher education systems are made up of different academic structures, systems of credentials, academic cultures, ideological foundations, and local cultures (Tang 2014a). In particular, their basic understanding about educational sovereignty and institutional/academic authority differs. This leads us to the question: Who is afraid of academic freedom (Bilgrami and Cole 2015)? Interactions may lead to enhanced multiculturalism. They may also create clashes of core values. Yet the issue is not as simple as represented by the media. Rather, it is the result of dynamic processes involving tensions and collaboration between the state, market, and academic profession in response to the trans-border spread of academic capitalism – and a possible dominance of Chinese academic capitalism.

6.3 Research Focus and Methodology

In Hong Kong's higher education sector, there are currently eight government-funded public universities. During Hong Kong's colonial period of 150 years, from 1842 to 1997, higher education was absent during the first 70 years. The first higher education institute, the University of Hong Kong (HKU), was founded in 1912. HKU was the one and only university in Hong Kong for half a century. The university became the hub to train colonial bureaucrats and professionals (Tang 2015).

After World War II, the need for college education increased as a result of the population boom in the post-war period (Rong 2002). The second university in Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), was established in 1963. CUHK was originally amalgamated from three colleges: New Asia College (founded in 1949), Chung Chi College (founded in 1951), and United College (founded in 1956).

The 1990s was an era of massification of higher education. The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), the third university in Hong Kong, was founded in 1991. Before the end of the century, four publicly funded universities, one private university, and one higher education institute were upgraded or combined with existing institutions to become universities (see Table 6.1). The expansion was due to the influence of demographic change, employment demand, talent retention purpose before hand-over, and knowledge advancement outside Hong Kong (Morris and Yeung 1994).

The expansion of government subsidized higher education institutes and degrees effectively shifted higher education from elite supply to massification of education during the decolonization period (Morris and Yeung 1994; Tang 2015). What this means, however, is still unclear, including the massive increase in sub-degree programs (Tang 2015; Wan 2011).

The legacy of the colonial period is the adoption of the United Kingdom's model of the chancellor governance system and University Grants Committee (UGC) funding scheme (Rong 2002). As we mentioned earlier, the chancellor of all public universities in Hong Kong was the Governor under the British colonial period, and after 1997 it has become the Chief Executive. UGC was established in 1965 and is now the major funding body of the whole public higher education sector. The percentage of UGC funding in terms of local GDP has been decreasing since the government's tightening fiscal policy of 2003.[1]

The data for this chapter was collected in two main ways: qualitative research using snowball sampling and newspaper reports on university-related issues. Between 2012 and 2013, we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with nine academic professionals, five graduate students, and two administrative staff members across the Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Art, Faculty of Sciences, and Faculty of Architecture in the case university. The majority of interview respondents were found through personal contacts and referrals from interviewees. Most of the interviews were recorded and then transcribed, and the interview data was subjected to thematic analysis.

For the newspaper reports, we collected more than 500 university-related news reports, magazine articles, and press releases from the Hong Kong government covering the period from July 2012 to July 2017 (the Chief Executive appointment

[1] University Grants Committee. (2019). Grants for UGC-funded Institutions as a whole, 2003/04 to 2018/19. Retrieved from http://cdcf.ugc.edu.hk/cdcf/searchStatSiteReport.do (accessed on 2019-11-19)

Table 6.1 Major universities in Hong Kong as of 2019

	Name[a]	Year of establishment	Number of degree program students as of 2019 (UGC funded programs)[b]	Number of staff as of 2019 (both academic and non-academic staff)[c]
1.	The University of Hong Kong (HKU)	1912	19,579	5,982
2.	The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU)	1937 (founded as Government Trade School) 1994 (granted full university title)	16,685	4,436
3.	Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU)	1956 (founded as Hong Kong Baptist College) 1994 (granted full university title)	7,478	2,019
4.	The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)	1963 (assumed full university status from three separate colleges)	20,122	5,633
5.	Lingnan University (LingnanU)	1967 (founded as Lingnan College) 1999 (granted full university title)	2,619	606
6.	City University of Hong Kong (CityU)	1984 (founded as City Polytechnic of Hong Kong) 1994 (granted full university title)	14,637	3,332
7.	The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)	1991	11,205	2,888
8.	The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK)	1994 (founded as The Hong Kong Institute of Education from five separate colleges) 2016 (granted full university title)	8,391	1,463

[a]Joint University Programmes Admissions System. (2015). University Grants Committee funded Programmes. Retrieved from http://www.jupas.edu.hk/en/about-jupas/introduction/ (accessed on 2016-05-21)

[b]University Grants Committee. (2019). Student Enrolment (Headcount) of UGC-funded Programmes by Institution, Level of Study, Mode of Study and Academic Programme Category, 2018/19. Retrieved from http://cdcf.ugc.edu.hk/cdcf/searchStatSiteReport.do (accessed on 2019-11-19)

[c]University Grants Committee. (2019). Staff Number (Headcount) in Academic Departments of UGC-funded Institutions by Source of Salary Funding, Institution, Staff Grade and Mode of Employment, 2018/19. Retrieved from http://cdcf.ugc.edu.hk/cdcf/searchStatSiteReport.do (accessed on 2019-11-19)

period of Mr. C.Y. Leung). The news reports and magazine articles were researched via printed and online channels from the Wisenews search engine.[2]

6.4 Findings and Discussion

6.4.1 Performativity Calculation Harms Teaching and Corrodes Academic Freedom

The rationale for academic freedom, according to the American Association of University Professors (2001:3), is that "institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of the individual teacher or the institution as a whole" (cited in Hao 2015: 115). But academic capitalism, "the market and market-like ideologies and practices in academe" (Hao 2015: 107), is forcing the case-study university to exhaust itself in pursuit of a better market ranking which is of benefit to the university itself rather than the common good.

An international survey on the changing academic professions around the world found that Hong Kong had the third highest percentage (64%) of academics who admitted that there was a strong performance orientation (Lee 2011). In this era of academic capitalism, a university's market ranking is closely associated with the calculation of the performativity of the university's academic staff – the total number of journal articles published in English-dominated internationally recognized journals such as journals on the list of Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Science Citation Index (SCI), and Arts and Humanity Citation Index (A&HCI). One of our interviewees, an associate professor from the university, stated:

> Since Antony Leung chaired [the University Grant Council], the university has started telling you that you need to publish a certain number of articles. The articles published are classified into 5 ranks. 1st to 3rd ranks refer to academic journals of international level hosted by famous, foreign universities. The 4th to 5th ranks are assigned to local academic journals and some local ones are not even classified…. Universities compete with one another. They brag about themselves to each other. They scramble to be number one. They fight for ranking. They fight because every university is fighting. The traditional university mission is to train our students so our society will have talent in teaching, research, developing [sic] and other fields. But now, some professors scarcely teach. They put less weight on their teaching job. I know some professors who claim themselves as research professors. They reduce their teaching. They don't teach in a serious manner. They got a promotion because they got research projects even though they got poor teaching evaluations from students. For those who have excellent teaching records but only have "ordinary" grades for their research activities, they are often neglected and even despised. Their Department Heads make things difficult for them and create a lot of obstacles to their promotion (associate professor, Faculty of Arts).

[2] The newspaper clipping covers articles from Am 730, Apple Daily (蘋果日報), etnet.com.hk (經濟通), Mingpao (明報), Wenweipo (文匯報), Oriental Daily (東方日報), hk.on.cc (東網), Hong Kong Economic Journal (信報), Hong Kong Commercial Daily (香港商報), Hong Kong Daily News (新報) (which stopped publishing in 2015), Hong Kong Economic Times (香港經濟日報), Singpao (成報), Takungpao (大公報), The Sun (太陽報) (which stopped publishing in 2016), YazhouZhoukan (亞洲週刊), and Next Media (壹週刊).

As a consequence, many academic staff set their first priority as publishing and obtaining more project funding so that they can collect more data and write more papers for publication. Teaching duties have been put aside, and the quality of teaching has been adversely affected as the reward mechanism is publication in so-called "first-tier" journals, not for good teaching. A student we interviewed said:

> At the very first class the professor just tends to say 'OK, I don't want to be here, you don't want to be here, let's just get this over with and hopefully all of you will pass.' So I feel like…if the department doesn't care about us and throws us all in this situation, then why should I care? Why should I bother to put in the effort to do well in this course? (postgraduate student, Faculty of Social Sciences).

This not only occurs in the classroom. Many professors take publication as their first priority and neglect the supervision of postgraduate students' thesis writing. Another student stated:

> We (my supervisor and I) don't socialize or talk about stuff outside of "work," though, and I guess I wish that things were different sometimes, but it's really a formal, business-like relationship that works out for everybody, because nobody asks for more than that. . . . I know friends who have finished their master's and only got to see their supervisor twice throughout the entire thesis! It's kind of like their supervisor gave them two brief meetings, they came to some sort of an understanding as to what the thesis was about, then the supervisor told them, "OK, you're on your own now, I can't see you anymore because I don't have the time" (postgraduate student, Faculty of Social Sciences).

The professor's mentality, illustrated by the comments such as "let's just get this [teaching] over with and hopefully all of you will pass" and "you're on your own now, I can't see you anymore because I don't have the time," indicates an alienation within the academic community, an unintended consequence of the ranking game. Many professors are exhausted by the strong competition of getting papers published in top journals. Some take the strategy of "focusing on publication but devalue teaching." With this mindset of competition, efficiency, productivity, and accountability, many professors are becoming what Weber (1958) calls "specialists without spirit" and "sensualists without heart" (cited in Hao 2015: 104). Professors are alienated from their students since they know a good teaching record does not play much of a role in academic promotion. Students have their own very clear mindset about their professors' mentality. Students "fight back" against this lack of accountability to them by intentionally "not put[ting] in the effort to do well in [their] course." Thus, these students are alienated from their classes and their professors. They begin to doubt what university leaders say in public. A postgraduate student points out that:

> Nominally, the university says all this stuff about holistic education and research that makes a contribution to humanity or whatever, but really we know that that's what they're obligated to say, that we want to be recognized as one of the best universities in the world, and the way to score points against other schools and climb up the rankings is to get a lot of money and spend it on getting people to do stuff that is generally recognized to be important (postgraduate student, Faculty of Social Sciences).

On the one hand, the university president, the faculty dean, and the department head make statements in public saying that they have students' best interests at

heart. They stress that students are the future of the university and the future of Hong Kong. On the other hand, they do not establish any practical mechanism to account for teaching performance as a key criterion for academic staff's career mobility. They are chasing after the wind of capitalism in the name of striving to become "world-class" institutes for the sake of a better future for the university.

The university is not supposed to be an institution that only produces graduates who simply bear its brand, a stamp of validation that verifies his or her fitness for work, with the fitter certified for higher-paid work; rather, they are supposed to be institutions which look for new knowledge and new ways of thinking. Professors should, ideally, combat the prevalent situation and rekindle their students' desire for knowledge. Embracing calculable and quantitative merit as a centric requirement for an individual's career development encourages the neglecting of classroom teaching and student supervising. In the name of enforcing university competitiveness, the university deprives students of the opportunity to develop. Professors' adaptation to the situation by succumbing to the pressure of capitalist competition results in their loss of academic freedom.

6.4.2 How Politics Affects Higher Education Governance and Hence Academic Freedom

A further threat to academic freedom comes from the politicization of higher education governance. There have been many new appointments of university council chairpersons and university presidents across Hong Kong's public universities since 2012. Professor Peter Mathieson, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong, resigned from the leadership position before the completion of his tenure. Through the press, he revealed that in the last days of his presidency, he received "pressure from everybody," including academic staff, student bodies, graduates, legislators, and politicians across the spectrum and the media. On a couple of occasions, local government leaders and the liaison office of Beijing also provided advice to the president as education in Hong Kong becomes an important issue in the national affairs of mainland China. Professor Mathieson commented that his premature departure was triggered, to a certain extent, by the lack of trust and cooperation with the newly appointed university council chairman who is a pro-establishment politician. In view of new practices in the Hong Kong political and educational arenas, it appears that there is no such thing as education sovereignty at the institutional level but, largely at a national level, as an imperative dimension of national sovereignty.

In Hong Kong's university governance, political loyalty to the Central government can be used as an effective management tool to bar controversial academics from taking up leadership positions in institutions. The appointment of Mr. Johannes Chan, a renowned law scholar of human rights, as a vice president of HKU was rejected by the Council in 2015, although the selection committee (led by the HKU

President) unanimously recommended it. After a process of deliberation and dispute lasting nearly 10 months, the pro-democracy academic was barred from the leadership position at HKU. His liberal stance on Hong Kong's electoral reform aroused a Hong Kong pro-Beijing newspaper to publish more than 300 articles accusing him of sympathizing and supporting his departmental colleague Mr. Benny Tai, who was a co-founder of the 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. A justification for the rejection of the appointment is that Mr. Johannes Chan was not a doctoral holder. However, a doctoral degree is not a necessary condition for this post in legal studies.

Hong Kong Baptist University decided not to renew the contract of Dr. Benson Wong Wai-kwok in 2018. The reasons given were the lack of course development and teaching excellence, though in his performance evaluation "very good" was given. Others suspect the real reason was his support of students' democratic activism and his presidency of the university's staff union. As a result of the Central government's political influence, there have been increasing tensions and lack of trust not only between faculty and administration but between students and university management and within the student body.

6.4.3 Academic Capitalism and Educational Sovereignty

As discussed above, academic freedom and institutional autonomy entail educational sovereignty which guarantees academics the freedom to decide what to research and teach, as well as how knowledge is created, disseminated, and applied. Educational sovereignty refers to the academics' freedom from the demands of laymen and the control and censorship of administrators. Academics should be entitled to professional autonomy to a substantial extent. Of course, educational sovereignty is inherently limited by performativity since academic freedom is earned through academic performance. However, our interview findings reveal that the educational sovereignty of Hong Kong academics is diminished in subtle ways, particularly under the ever-intensifying pressure of neoliberalism and managerialism. In an international survey on the changing academic professions, 72% of Hong Kong academics revealed that the management style is top-down. The figure is the second highest among the 18 systems surveyed in that international study (Lee 2011).

An associate professor from the Faculty of Arts, who recently retired, explained that before the neoliberal reform of the Hong Kong academic profession, he enjoyed more professional autonomy and a spirit of freedom:

> In the past we enjoyed much freedom in research. But now we need to go through many levels of assessment. Amid them there is also much auditing [sic]. Now research has been denatured. Moreover, universities are in the status of mutual competition, glorifying themselves over one another. All are ambitious to be number one. They are simply competing for the sake of competition (associate professor, Faculty of Arts).

This audit culture affects educational sovereignty. A part-time teaching consultant in our research interview commented that there is too much jargon in official

documents for communicating learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and marking rubrics. An associate professor of the Faculty of Arts criticized the practice of students evaluating teaching because it confuses cause and effect. This practice produces a vicious cycle whereby professors lower standards and expectations because they worry about students' negative evaluation due to demanding coursework. In turn, the quality of university education – what students should have learned – is adversely affected. Offering a diagnostic point of view, an interviewee said:

> I think teaching evaluations (TEs) can help sort out some extreme cases. But indeed for those extreme cases, be they very bad or very good teachers, we can see them and know them even without TEs. Therefore, I think it is unnecessary to conduct TEs if it is only very structural and mechanical in nature (associate professor who previously served as department head, Faculty of Architecture).

In terms of how research is conducted and disseminated to interdisciplinary colleagues, some academics in Hong Kong enjoy less educational sovereignty than others. An interviewee explained:

> Take the case of the Chinese language, the targeted audience is Chinese societies. But if you aim at publishing in the international journals overseas, it is "impossible." The readership of those international journals is not mainly from the Chinese world [sic], therefore they are less likely to accept your manuscripts, or feel interested in your research. In cases where your research is on Chinese language, but you use English to convey your research findings, that creates a barrier of communication. And when you teach them [your findings], you need to translate them back into Chinese. … It is not effective at all! Isn't it better to use the same language to communicate research findings for research on languages and literature? (former associate professor, Faculty of Arts).

Another factor which has recently emerged which affects the educational sovereignty of Hong Kong's higher education institutions is the powerful trend of "mainlandization" on Hong Kong campuses. A former associate professor from a Faculty of Architecture revealed that in the context of post-colonial Hong Kong, objective advice and professional judgment can be politicized and distorted. Although there is no official evidence for the following particular issue, many professors worry about a controversial issue which arose in a local university. One of our interviewees explained this anxiety as follows:

> Because the university president is a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, he found a person of the "same color" [meaning same political orientation] to join the center of China Studies. At that time, a lot of people had already explained that the national education [system] could not be implemented [in Hong Kong], yet he insisted on doing so. It was because he wanted to please the officials in the authorities [sic]. If you are a genuine scholar, and if you truly hold no biased view, how could you use the mainland ways of interpretation and mindset to make sense of Hong Kong's education and pedagogy? If he was true to academic research, the issue would not have been messed up so severely (former associate professor and department head, Faculty of Architecture).

Educational sovereignty also safeguards academics by allowing them to decide what kind of students to admit to higher education institutions. Yet given the huge market of mainland Chinese students who seek further studies in Hong Kong as a prestigious education hub in the region, Hong Kong universities may admit more

mainland students than the optimal number, especially for self-financed programs (usually at the master's level). A full-time native Hong Kong student who was studying at a self-financed master's program commented that in actuality internationalization at his university is played out as de-localization or, more specifically, mainlandization. In his class of about 25 students, more than half of the students are from mainland China, with a few foreign students (one Greek, one South African, one British, one American). Apparently, the expansion of self-financed programs and the quest for internationalization has brought a paradoxical result, that is, mainlandization of Hong Kong. It occurs partly as a result of academic capitalism, and academics do not have a say on this issue.

Educational sovereignty and academic freedom are increasingly under siege, especially since the Umbrella/Occupy Movement of 2014. This movement was organized and supported by many university academics and students (although a majority of Hong Kong academics were not active in expressing their opinions and taking part in the Movement). Since then, some top-down control measures, including termination of contract renewal or refusal of promotion to key leadership positions, were imposed on a number of politically active and outspoken academics, with a view to limiting academic freedom in Hong Kong (Carrico 2018). State-connected community leaders were appointed to important leadership roles, for instance, the chairperson of the university council who governs university management (Lo 2018). One of the most disputable examples was the appointment of Dr. Arthur Li Kwok Cheung as the Council Chairman of the University of Hong Kong and the subsequent decision on the appointment of Vice-President and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Staffing and Resources) in 2015. The accusation was that this case resulted in the increasing control of Hong Kong university councils regarding staff appointment with a view toward political censorship. Further research is called for to examine whether there has been an ethos of self-censorship among Hong Kong academics with regard to researching and/or teaching politically sensitive topics.

Despite the endangerment of educational sovereignty of Hong Kong's academic profession, university academics are not keen on participating in university governance through unionization. A former department head from the Faculty of Architecture admitted that he himself was not enthusiastic and was fully aware of this matter; and he thought that there were sufficient channels for academics to voice their opinions. Explaining his lukewarm participation in unionization, he said:

> I think the reason is relatively complex. For some academics like me, we are already very busy with the service work for other professional communities outside the university. If the University approaches us and expects us to participate in some committees, we try our best to cooperate. But talking about involving [ourselves] further in the university committee services, I myself will not do so…. This is perhaps because we are a professional department…. I already engage in service for the government and other organizational boards, I cannot manage to extend my involvement (associate professor and former department head Faculty of Architecture).

Therefore, who is afraid of educational sovereignty and thus academic freedom (Bilgrami and Cole 2015) and who should be concerned about it more? Surveying

the history and contemporary realities of higher education worldwide, Altbach (2015) argues that academic freedom has always been contested by discourses and debates outside the academic profession, instead of forces from within. When professionals inside the higher education sector are less interested, less enthusiastic, or even afraid of articulating the definition and core principles of academic freedom amidst the increasing external demand of academic capitalism accountability, it becomes more challenging for it to be protected.

6.4.4 Conflicts Between Academic Roles and Public Intellectual Roles

Hao and Guo's (2016) study on professors in China (see Chap. 4) argues that professors as intellectuals have multifaceted identities and engage in synchronic political roles as established/organic, non-establishment/professional, and contra-establishment/critical intellectuals, although most take on the first two roles. The established/organic intellectuals take their priority status role as organic to the state while acknowledging their occasional synchronic role of dissent. The non-establishment/professional intellectuals keep their distance from politics. They focus on their professional and academic work and perform their organic and critical role occasionally. The contra-establishment/critical intellectuals are viewed as public intellectuals that serve as the conscience of society and openly air their concerns about social justice in China.

Indeed, the critical role is the most difficult to perform, even in Hong Kong. Professors in Hong Kong are severely criticized by pro-government forces if they make public comments deviating from the Central government's statements on Hong Kong social and political issues. For example, in April 2018, Benny Tai, Associate Professor of Law from the University of Hong Kong, received a barrage of criticism for his discussion on the possible formats of independence for Hong Kong and Taiwan. The Chinese Communist Party-owned newspaper, *The People's Daily,* called on the Hong Kong government to take legal action against Tai under Hong Kong's existing criminal law. A Hong Kong government spokesperson said that the Hong Kong government "strongly condemns" Tai's remark. Forty-one pro-establishment Hong Kong legislators made public statements calling for Tai's dismissal from his university post (Leung and Sharma 2018, April 6). Professors who are politically active (especially those who participated in the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement) receive serious condemnation from pro-China media. Some of them have even been removed from their university positions. For example, in March 2015, Dr. Horace Chin Wan-kan, Assistant Professor of Chinese at Hong Kong's Lingnan University, received a letter from the president of his university saying that his activism "severely hurt the reputation of Lingnan." Dr. Chin was subsequently removed from his university post (Sharma 2018, January 26).

Apparently, what professors can teach in the classroom and what they can do in public are severely restricted. Professors, as intellectuals, encourage their students to develop independent and critical thinking in their teaching subjects. The antithesis of this is that if they practice what they have been teaching regarding sensitive social or political issues, they are ridiculed for doing so. They even receive punishment for their critical comments and actions. The two incidents mentioned in the previous paragraph, and many other cases, happened to Hong Kong academic staff who felt a strong force from pro-government groups that urged professors to stay strictly within their academic roles. Pro-government groups prefer professors in Hong Kong to focus on their duty of creating and divulging knowledge by engaging in research and teaching within the academic framework. If professors engage themselves in the role of a public intellectual, they will be discredited, and they may be disqualified from their professional role. This is most likely associated with pressure from the authorities in Beijing to try to limit academic freedom and bring academia under their control.

6.5 Conclusion

The Hong Kong case indicates that performativity is calculated with overemphasized quantifiable measurements. The university evaluation system is predominantly shaped by global rankings, cost-effective evaluation criteria, and a goal-oriented and administrative-led managerial mentality. Market rationality, managerialism, and an entrepreneurial mode of governance have brought deep and negative effects to the autonomy of professorial roles and hence educational sovereignty and academic freedom. The majority of academics in our study have experienced unrelenting pressure to publish material in western-dominated, English-language journals. Their teaching duties were put aside because good performance in classrooms does not contribute much to career mobility within the current reward system. Within this context, our research found that the lack of whole-hearted commitment to students is a common problem across departments and faculties. This is a result of the negative influence of academic capitalism on academic freedom in terms of what to teach and how to teach.

A “new normal” appears to be emerging in terms of the professional practices of Hong Kong’s academics. Problematically, participation in civic and social movements, especially those not in line with the government’s nationalist agenda, are judged as unprofessional and decried as going beyond the professional duties of research and teaching. In the two decades after the founding of the Hong Kong SAR, when academic freedom and institutional autonomy were threatened, various stakeholders in Hong Kong society, including activist students (Tang 2014b), would come together to collectively defend both freedom and autonomy. Independent institutional or judicial reviews would be engaged. Now, as Hong Kong SAR continues into its third decade, new governing practices seem to be normalized, resisting any social and political reform. Hong Kong’s academics are starting to adapt to

the new normal without much protest, seeing and believing that protests against the powerful might be futile. As society is being polarized into pro-democracy versus pro-establishment/national camps, universities fail to function as a place where the truth is pursued, deliberated, and defended and academics fail in their role as public intellectuals.

Who does a university represent? What are the mission and vision of a university? Why is educational sovereignty essential for a university to fulfill its mission and vision? There is an urgent call in international academic communities to rethink these fundamental and important questions in this era when universities fall under the influence of globalized academic capitalism and the commercialization and corporatization discussed in this book. This chapter takes universities in Hong Kong as a case study and argues that academic freedom is under siege in this energetic, entrepreneurial city as elsewhere. Our case study in Hong Kong highlights the escalating pressures on intellectual work and the increasing alienation among both professionals and students.

Our research found that varying degrees of anxiety, resentment, disgruntlement, and discontent among university communities have been simmering. In this current era, academic "freedom" appears to be in danger of being largely confined only to the freedom to excel performatively within the strict limits of a corporatized and commercialized capitalist system. When structural forces intertwine with and compound each other to produce deep and far-reaching effects that are often beyond the control of the individual actors, including university leaders, what is next for the future of educational sovereignty and the international academic profession?

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