

# Globalisation and Higher Education Restructuring in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China

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*ABSTRACT Globalisation and the evolution of the knowledge-based economy have caused dramatic changes in the character and functions of higher education in most countries around the world. However, the impacts of globalisation on universities are not uniform even though similar business-like practices have been adopted to cope with competition in the global marketplace. The pressure for restructuring and reforming higher education is mainly derived from growing expectations and demands of different stakeholders in society. In the last decade, government bureaucracy, public service institutions and higher education institutions and universities have been significantly affected by the tidal wave of the public sector reform around the world. Apart from improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public services, universities are confronted with a situation in which the principles of financial accountability and responsiveness to stakeholders prevail amidst the massification stage under the condition of global economic retrenchment. In response to such pressing demands for change, policies and strategies of decentralisation, privatisation and marketisation are becoming increasingly popular measures in university governance. Reform strategies and measures like quality assurance, performance evaluation, financial audit, corporate management and market competition are adopted to reform and improve the performance of the higher education sector. This article examines the most recent higher education reforms and restructuring in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China, with particular reference to the issues related to globalisation of decentralisation and marketisation in higher education.*

## **Globalisation and the Question of State Capacity**

In the last decade or so, the liberalisation of national economies, the domination of supranational institutions, the disempowerment of nation-states, the prevalence of the system and culture of liberal democracy, as well as the formation of a consumer culture across the globe have made the whole world in many ways more alike (Fukuyama, 1992; Ohmae, 1990; Waters, 2001; Sklair, 1999). Scholars who support the ideas of globalisation believe that there is an inevitable convergence of human activities. The rapid globalisation and the strong demands for economic and social developments, based on national survival and growth, in both international and regional competitions, have become increasingly keen. Many globalists strongly believe that the dissolution of territorial borders and the growing interdependence

and interconnectedness of different countries have made the traditional national/territorial boundary inappropriate (Gray, 1998; Held *et al.*, 1999).

It is also argued that the growing impact of globalisation has unquestionably weakened the capacity or limited the role of the nation state in managing the public domain. Instead of assuming the role as the driver for change, modern states have to take a backseat role within the framework of rising regional economies and a global marketplace (Ohmae, 1999; Faulks, 2000). On the one hand, modern states have to compete for the huge sums of transnational capital investment. On the other hand, they have to surrender some state autonomy in exchange for a better position in the global market place. At the same time, modern states may encounter market failure since “greater international capital mobility made manipulation of the economy at the national level more difficult” (Slaughter, 1998, p. 53).

It is in such a wider socio-political and socio-economic context that notions like “wither the state” (Waters, 2001; Massey, 1997), “the decline of the state and territory” (Axford, 1995), “hollowing out of state” (Cerny, 1996); “dissolving the nation state” (McGrew, 1992) and “governance without government” (Rhodes, 1997) are employed by different scholars to conceptualise the weakening state capacity in the context of globalisation. Therefore, it is believed that individual states have to change their roles and their constitutions in order to accommodate, and not adapt to, the demands and pressures generated from external environments. “Reinventing government” (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992) and “entrepreneurial government” (Ferlie *et al.*, 1996) have become fashionable terms and the concomitant consequence is the initiation of reforms in public sector management. In order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery, new ways to maximise productivity and effectiveness comparable to that of the private sector are sought (Dale, 1997).

### **Globalisation, Changing Governance and Educational Restructuring**

The questioning of state capacity and the perceived challenges generated from the processes of globalisation have driven modern states to reflect upon the ways they are managed by searching for new governance models to promote “good government”. Central to the debate of governance is the changing relationship between the state and the non-state sectors and actors in terms of social and public policy provision. Unlike the classical approach of welfare state whereby the state had assumed a very dominant role in welfare provision (i.e. the primary social and public policy provider), the globalisation challenges have urged modern states to find new alternatives for governance.

In order to search for new alternatives to promote “good government”, different governance modes are emerging. As Peters suggested, the market model, the participatory state model, the flexible government model and deregulated government model are alternatives to the traditional system. The emergence of these models has suggested different kinds of problems embedded in the traditional governance system, such as the self-interest of bureaucrats and the ineffective management of government (Peters, 1996). Similarly, Rhodes (1997) also argues that modern states

are experiencing a “new process of governing” (p. 46) and there has been a strong need to redefine the relationship between the state and non-state sectors. During such a process of redefinition, different governance models are evolving, namely, the minimal state, corporate governance, the new public management, “good governance”, socio-cybernetic system and self-organising networks (Rhodes, 1997, pp. 46–47).

Realising the state alone can never meet the pressing demands from the public in social policy provision and public management, the revitalisation process of civil society is underway, therefore co-arrangement between the state and the society is becoming a far more popular public policy trend. Emphasising the interactions between the state and society as a “two-way” traffic or bilateral model, the “one-way” “command and control model” is replaced by the “social-political governance” model (Kooiman, 1993; Cooper, 1995).

Putting the above observations related to changing governance into perspective, we can argue that the major shift of national politics from maximising welfare to promoting entrepreneurial culture, innovation and profitability in both the private and public sectors has led modern states to adopt the techniques of steering from a distance through the means of regulation, incentive and sanctions to make autonomous individuals and quasi-governmental and non-governmental institutions such as universities behave in ways consistent with their policy objectives (Marginson, 1999; Henry *et al.*, 1999). In short, this paradigm shift is manifested by a more individualistic, competitive and entrepreneurial approach central to public management (Robertson & Dale, 2000). Such a move has inevitably transformed modern states into the “market-facilitating state” (Howell, 1993), the “market-building state” (Fligstein, 1997) or the “competitive state” (Cerny, 1996). Therefore, the role of the government/nation state has changed fundamentally from a “provider of welfare benefits” to a “builder of markets”, whereby the state actively builds markets, shapes them in different ways and regulates them (Sbragia, 2000).

In the face of global economic retrenchment and relatively weakened state capacity in social service and policy provision, there has been the pressure for restructuring and reforming education driven by growing expectations and demands of different stakeholders in society. Widespread concerns over widened access, funding, accountability, quality and managerial efficiency are perceived as prominent global trends for education. In addition, the further expansion of universities is built upon the basis of greater accountability but with lesser autonomy. Collegial processes of democracy within universities are taken over by stronger corporate management. Moreover, the role of universities has changed in such a way that they act less as critics of society but more as servants responding to the needs of the economy, while contracting its main functions to supply qualified manpower and undergoing applied research in response to market demands. In reality, universities are at a crossroad between the alleged democracy of a whimsical collegiality and the problematic efficiency of a hard-nosed managerialism (Dearlove, 1995). The present article, as set out in this wider theoretical and public policy context, examines how educational governance modes have been changing in the Chinese societies of Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China.

### **Common Challenges to Higher Education in Greater China**

The rise of the knowledge economy has generated new global infrastructures with information technology playing an increasingly important role. The popularity and prominence of information technology has unquestionably changed the nature of knowledge, and is currently restructuring higher education, research and learning. The changes in the socio-economic context resulting from the globalised economy have inevitably led to changes in the university sector. It is in such a wider policy context that an increasing number of institutions of higher learning are being established with new missions and innovative configurations of training, serving populations that previously had little access to higher education. Major challenges common to Chinese societies include:

- the ever-increasing rate of human progress;
- the rise of the knowledge economy and the changing university;
- the growing significance of information technology in education delivery;
- the massification of higher education and the need for quality control;
- the East Asian financial crisis and the post-crisis adjustments; and
- social and political changes and the need to change higher education (Townsend & Cheng, 2000).

We have just discussed the challenges that these Chinese societies are now facing, let us now turn to how and what strategies that these Chinese societies have adopted in reforming their higher education systems in order to meet the challenges of globalisation.

### **Higher Education Restructuring in Greater China**

Although it is difficult to make generalisations about the patterns, trends and models in higher education restructuring in these Chinese societies, since each society has its own stage and speed of development, a scrutiny of higher education reforms finds some common themes.

#### *(1) Comprehensive Reviews of Education Systems and Fundamental Reforms*

The governments of East Asian societies like Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea and Mainland China have conducted comprehensive reviews of their higher education systems. In Hong Kong, the University Grants Committee reviewed its higher education system in 1996 (UGC, 1996) while another comprehensive review of Hong Kong's overall education systems was completed in 2000 (Education Commission, 2000). Another round of comprehensive review of the higher education system was launched by the University Grants Committee (UGC, hereafter) in May 2001. The review covers major aspects of higher education provision, including an administrative framework for a much expanded post-secondary sector and the governance of universities. More specifically, the latest review examines issues like the definition of higher education, the role of higher education, gover-

nance structure for the higher education sector, university governance, research and identification of factors that will affect further developments of higher education in Hong Kong (UGC, 2001). After such a comprehensive review, the UGC aims to formulate new policies and governance models for the higher education sector.

In Taiwan, the government started to reform higher education following the lifting of martial law in 1987. A review of the education system was started in mid-1990s. After the review, the government was keen to internationalise Taiwan's higher education, universities were therefore encouraged to establish links and academic exchanges with universities overseas. In addition, the Taiwan Government has attempted to introduce measures to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of higher education, particularly in terms of funding methodology, modes of provision and new management strategies (Tai, 2000; Weng, 2000; Mok, 2000b). With the changing governance philosophy, the state-education relationship has been redefined as the government has introduced the policy of "privatisation" in education. This policy reflects the revitalisation of the private sector and the mobilisation of other non-state sources to run education, through which the pressure of the state to meet the demands for higher education can be alleviated (Law, 2003; Mok, 2000a, 2002).

Similar developments can be found in Mainland China. Higher education reform was started in the mid-1980s when the CCP attempted to create more opportunities for access. Following the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1970s, China had a shortage of qualified teaching staff and appropriate curricula, resources and facilities. The Chinese authorities decided to borrow knowledge, techniques and technologies from the West. Teachers were brought into universities from overseas to provide Chinese staff and students with access to foreign learning. Meanwhile, thousands of Chinese students were sent overseas to study for higher degrees. After restoration and consolidation for a few years, new reforms of higher education were launched in the mid-1980s. In the past decade or so, major reforms related to higher education were introduced with the central features of decentralisation and marketisation (Kwong, 1997; Yin & White, 1994). It is note-worthy that the comprehensive reform blueprint places emphasis on local responsibility, diversity of educational opportunities, multiple sources of educational funds, and decentralisation of power to individual higher education institutions in the governance of their own affairs despite the fact that the State Education Commission (SEC) still performs the role of "guiding" and "monitoring" the whole sector (Mok & Ngok, 2001).

## *(2) Policies of Decentralisation and Educational Governance*

One of the changes common to these Chinese societies is the adoption of a decentralisation policy. Educational decentralisation is a popular reform of governments around the world even though diverse strategies and outcomes have resulted (Hanson, 1998). In Hong Kong, the call for quality education and the launch of university-based management were initiated within a decentralisation policy framework. Instead of "micro-control", individual universities are now given more autonomy and power in determining their daily affairs. Nonetheless, this development

does not necessarily mean deregulation and retreat of the state's control. Rather, the government can exercise control through its executive arm, the UGC, to maintain a close watch over individual institutional performance. The approach to reforming the higher education system is a managerial or an executive-led model, attaching importance to the ideas of efficiency, effectiveness and economy in education (Mok & Welch, 2003). Starting with a self-monitoring assessment exercise and leading to more formal quality assurance movement has strengthened instead of weakened the government's control (Tse, 2002; Mok, 2000a).

The fundamental changes in Taiwan's higher education sector since the late 1980s can be conceptualised as processes of denationalisation, decentralisation and autonomisation. "Denationalisation" implies that the state has begun to forsake its monopoly on higher education, allowing the non-state sector and even the market to engage in higher education provision. "Decentralisation" refers to the shift from the "state control model" to "state supervision model", whereby educational governance is decentralised from educational bureaucracies to devolved systems of schooling or universities, entailing significant degrees of institutional autonomy and a variety of forms of school-based or university-based management and administration. The term "autonomisation" refers to university academics having more autonomy to conduct research projects of any kind and far more discretion to manage and operate their institutions. The processes of "decentralisation" and "autonomisation" have become increasingly popular on the island state, but the idea of *song-bang* (liberalisation or autonomisation) should not be understood as the total withdrawal of the state. Within the educational decentralisation context, the Taiwanese Government is still the major provider of education services. The revised *University Law* stipulates that all national universities will become independent legal bodies and thus they are held accountable to the public. All state universities will be run by independent boards of directors and the state will gradually reduce its subsidy to these public universities. The proposed changes will inevitably transform the way universities are financed, regulated and managed (Law, 2003; Weng, 2001; *United News*, 28 December 1999).

Before higher education reform commenced in the 1980s, higher education governance could be characterised as a "centralised" or "state dominated" model in Mainland China. Under such a governing model, the Ministry of Education (MOE) took responsibility for the design of curricula, syllabuses and textbooks, student admission and graduate job assignment and also exerted control over budgets, salary scales and personnel issues (Mok, 1996). Provincial and local education commissions and bureaus were simply mediators of national policy. In the post-Mao period, such a centralised governance model is believed to be inefficient in administration and ineffective in service delivery. In order to create greater higher education opportunities, the Chinese Government has adopted a policy of decentralisation since the 1980s to transfer authority (particularly financial) and decision-making from higher to lower levels. Under the policy of decentralisation, local governments are given more flexibility and autonomy to chart the course of higher education development. This development is particularly significant for the socio-economically prosperous regions, such as the southeastern coastal areas, where the provincial or

municipal governments are able to allocate more resources to finance higher education. The MOE is now charged with responsibilities to coordinate higher education development; while the central government and local government are engaged in a new relationship described by the principle of “*gongjian*” (joint administration). In “*gongjian*”, local governments are charged with more responsibilities in higher education financing, provision and management while the central government only acts as regulator and coordinator. Local governments manage staff establishment, labour and wage of universities; while individual universities even enjoy far more autonomy and flexibility to run their own businesses (Mok & Ngok, 2001; Mok & Chan, 2001; Mok, 2001a, 2001b).

### *(3) The Marketisation and Privatisation of Higher Education*

In addition to the trend of educational decentralisation, higher education developments in East Asian societies have been affected by the strong tide of marketisation and privatisation. Universities now experience pressures from governments, the main providers of higher education, to demonstrate maximum outputs from the financial inputs they are given. During a period of economic constraint, people begin to seek better use of limited public money, thus more attention is given to the issue of “value for money” and how the investment in higher education can really facilitate social and economic development (Mok & Lo, 2001; Law, 2003). In order to make the delivery of higher education more efficient and effective, there has been an increasingly popular trend of marketisation and privatisation in the higher education sector in the region (Kwong, 2000; Bray, 2000).

As with experiences in other parts of the world, these changes are closely related to the “marketisation” of education, whereby private sector principles are adopted to run education (Whitty, 1997). In order to reduce the state’s financial burden, different market-related strategies are adopted such as increasing student tuition fees, reducing state allocations, strengthening the relationship between the university sector and the industrial and business sectors, and encouraging universities and academics to engage in business and market-like activities to generate revenue. Comparing the marketisation and privatisation projects of East Asian societies, it appears that for Hong Kong the reform strategies along the line of marketisation are designed to improve the efficiency and performance of the university sector rather than purely for resolving financial difficulties (Lee, 2001; Mok, 2000a).

In the midst of economic crisis, coupled with pressing demand for higher education, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has recently announced the adoption of a privatisation policy to create more learning opportunities for higher education. In 2000, Tung called for the expansion of higher education by doubling the number of associate degrees in the next ten years. However, the problem faced by the HKSAR is understanding how to expand enrolment at this rate (Tung, 2000). One strategy is to adopt a self-financing model by the adoption of a user-charge principle. In October 2001, Fanny Law, the former Secretary for Education and Manpower, noted that the government has taken into consideration the possibility of privatising the currently publicly funded universities in Hong Kong

(*Ming Pao Daily News*, 31 October 2001). In the meantime, the UGC has recently considering shedding the civil-service salary structures of the UGC-funded higher education institutions to allow salaries to reflect performance and market forces (*Ming Pao Daily News*, 15 October 2001). These proposed measures clearly indicate that privatisation has begun to shape higher education development in Hong Kong (Mok & Lo, 2001).

The market strategies adopted in the university sector in Taiwan are not only to explore additional non-state resources to finance higher education but also to improve performance and effectiveness (Tai, 2000; Weng, 2001). With an increase in the population enrolment ratio to 40 per cent in 1998, the higher education sector in Taiwan has been expanding incessantly. In the reform context, the MOE has attempted to devolve responsibility and power to individual higher education institutions, as well as autonomy for educational financing. Multiple channels of higher education financing have been encouraged by the Taiwanese government with the MOE now providing only 75 to 80 per cent of the total budget for national higher education institutions. National universities now must search for alternative non-state sources of income to support their operational costs. With the increasing pressures of financial autonomy, Taiwanese higher education institutions are becoming more marketised and privatised amidst the policy trend of decentralisation (Mok, 2002; Mok & Lo, 2001).

In the post-Mao era, reformers have taken significant steps to privatise social welfare services in Mainland China (Wong & Flynn, 2001). After the official endorsement of the socialist market system in the 1990s, strong market forces have affected educational development. Despite the post-Mao leaders' discomfort with the term "privatisation", signs of state withdrawal from the provision of social welfare are clear. In the last decade or so, the Chinese Government has allowed the rise of the market in the education sector. The emergence of private educational institutions, the shift of state responsibility in educational provision to families and individuals, the prominence of fee-charging, the growth of *minban* (people-run) colleges and universities, as well as the introduction of internal competition among higher educational institutions have clearly indicated that China's higher education is experiencing a process of marketisation. The author's field visits and field research conducted in mainland China in recent years have repeatedly confirmed that Chinese people are very concerned about higher education and there is an urgent need for more access to higher education. If reliance upon the central government alone can not satisfy the demand for higher education, Chinese residents are willing to spend their own savings on providing their children with a university education (Zhu, 2000; Li, 2000).

### **Discussion: Local Autonomy vs Globalisation Pressures**

There are many changes common to higher education systems in these Chinese societies, suggesting that higher education developments have been affected by similar global trends. "Hyperglobalists" have argued that the increasing connections and interactions between different nation states and the freer and quicker inter-

change and movement of capital, goods, services, people, technologies, information and ideas will lead to an inevitable convergence of human activities and a receding role for the nation state (Ohmae, 1990; Fukuyama, 1992; Waters, 2001). However, some scholars have criticised the concept of global convergence as dominated by an Anglo-Saxon perception. Furthermore, the global convergence thesis is criticised as a myth by others since individual countries experience their own stages and patterns of development (Hesse, 1997, p. 117).

The preceding discussion has indicated that even though similar strategies are adopted by different countries in response to the so-called tide of globalisation, different governments may use these strategies to serve their own political purposes. As Hallak (2000) has rightly suggested, modern states may tactically make use of the globalisation discourse to justify their own political agendas or legitimise their inaction. As for Hong Kong, the call for quality control in higher education must be understood as part of the larger project of the public sector reform started since the late 1980s. The adoption of the managerial approach in university governance is designed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the higher education sector so that Hong Kong may be maintained as one of the more dynamic and competitive international academic centres. For this reason, the recent higher education reforms must be placed within the wider public policy reform/public management reform context in Hong Kong. Hence, reform strategies along the line of managerialism introduced in Hong Kong's higher education can be understood as simply another phase in the reengineering project underway since 1989 (Mok, 2000a).

For Taiwan, the call for higher education reforms and quality assurance has to do with the particular socio-political environment of the island-state. As Taiwan has become a more politically liberal and democratic society, university academics are eager to establish links with the external world, while the state is very keen to make the island-state more international. Thus the emphasis on the importance of international benchmarking and the significance of internationalisation can be understood as strategies to make Taiwan less isolated within the international community. In addition, the rapid expansion of private higher education in Taiwan has caused concern for improving and assuring the quality of higher education (Weng, 2001; Law, 2003).

Unlike Hong Kong or the marketisation experiences in the West, the Chinese marketisation of education has not yet entirely adopted a managerial approach whereby reforms in managing educational institutions and the introduction of control mechanisms in the university sector are believed to be the most effective ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery (Taylor *et al.*, 1997; Welch, 1998). What characterises the Chinese experience of marketisation is the "institutional transition", meaning a transition from a highly centralised economic planning system to the market economy (Li, 1997). In the midst of the transition, the Chinese Government has gradually retreated from the public domain, trying to mobilise non-state sectors and governments at the local level to engage in public service/policy provision. As such, market forces are being adopted to generate additional resources to run education. Thus, the marketisation of higher education in mainland China can be understood more fully by examining the interactions

between the demonopolisation of the state's role in the public domain and the challenges and pressures resulting from the institutional transition. Seen in this light, the Chinese marketisation project has been locally driven rather than purely driven by the growing impact of globalisation.

Analysing the current educational developments in these societies from a public policy perspective, we find that higher education reforms are pursued within the context of managing state-building (or government-capacity) and economic growth in a state-directed (or government-directed) paradigm of governance. The introduction of higher education reforms in these societies can be interpreted as the strategies adopted by government to cope with the problems of political and bureaucratic governance rather than purely problems of economic and social difficulties no matter how severe.

Despite governments in these societies initiating policies of decentralisation in the higher education sector in recent years to allow individual universities more autonomy in their development, it is incorrect to argue that the state/government has retreated entirely from the higher education domain. Instead, the governments of these societies have taken a rather proactive approach to review their higher education systems and initiated reforms to nurture more creative and innovative citizens for national development. Even though similar patterns and trends in higher education development can be identified in these societies, the above discussion has suggested that Chinese governments are able to employ the globalisation discourse to shape a local political agenda. Most important of all, these national comparisons reveal the presence of diverse national and local agendas that give different meanings to the common management terminology and claims for so-called global trends (Cheung, 2000). If we accept diversity in domestic administrative agenda as the norm rather than the exception in global public management and governance, we may be in a better place to understand the impact of globalisation.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, while there are clear globalisation trends, especially in the economy and technology, the nation state is still a powerful actor in shaping a nation's development and in resolving global-national tensions. More importantly, the analysis of this paper indicates that not all nations have responded in the same way to globalisation due of the specificities of their national histories, politics, cultures and economies. Therefore, the so-called global tide of market competition, non-state provision of public services, corporate governance, system-wide and institutional performance management should not be treated as an undifferentiated universal trend. These different elements undoubtedly reinforce each other, though they are not be equivalent or interchangeable. Instead, they may take different configurations, which remain nation-specific as well as global. Instead of simply a process of globalisation, the formulation of national policies is the result of the complicated and dynamic processes of "glocalization" (Mok & Lee, 2001). Therefore, globalisation practices in higher education should not be analysed in terms of a one-dimensional movement from "the state" (understood as non-market and

bureaucratic) to “the market” (understood as non-state and corporate). Rather, we must contextually analyse the interaction between a range of factors that are critical in shaping the local context and the impetus for change driven by global trends.

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