

The Context and Development of Language Policy and Knowledge Production in Universities in Hong Kong

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Abstract

In this paper the colonial history of university education in Hong Kong, and the recent changes in the governance of universities driven by global management discourses and practices are documented and critically examined. With the systemic penetration of global economic rationalism, Hong Kong universities have been under forces for structural changes including “internationalization” and “Englishization” of university MOI and university research and publication cultures. The long-term consequences of these global processes will be discussed in terms of potential risks of the narrowing of the intellectual space and the colonization of knowledge production, resulting in the subordination of local societal needs, indigenous knowledges and epistemologies. A balanced approach to designing policies regarding university MOI and research output assessment criteria, as well as what intellectuals and scholars might do to maintain their intellectual space will be proposed.

The historical context of university education in Hong Kong: British cultural colonialism and English language dominance

Since Hong Kong was ceded by Dynastic China (the Ching Dynasty) to Britain as a colony in 1842 as a result of the Ching Dynasty's defeat in the Opium War (triggered by Britain's revenge on Ching Official Lin's destruction of the East Indian Company's opium merchandise in Guangdong), vernacular or Chinese-medium education (usually practised as Cantonese in speaking and Modern Standard Chinese in writing) has received little government support. By 1911, the British Hong Kong colonial government was providing an English-medium education up to university level for children largely from well-to-do families, and a vernacular primary education for children from less well-to-do families (Irving 1914). In 1935, a British progressive education inspector, Edmund Burney, visited Hong Kong and completed the famous Burney Report (1935), in which he criticized the Hong Kong government for neglecting vernacular education. It can be seen that not all British officials were culturally and linguistically imperialistic (Sweeting and Vickers 2007). However, government resources continued to be channelled mainly to English-medium schools, cultivating a Westernized, English-conversant elite among the local Chinese population (see historical documentation by Fu 1975).

The spread of British influence behind the establishment of the first university in Hong Kong in 1911

The elite from the English-medium schools described above went to the English-medium University of Hong Kong, which was the only government-funded and

recognized university in Hong Kong until 1963, when The Chinese University of Hong Kong was established from assembling a number of previously Chinese-medium private colleges. The establishment of the University of Hong Kong in 1911 symbolized both British cultural rule and the aim of producing an Anglicized ruling Chinese elite in Hong Kong society to support British colonial rule and to extend Britain's cultural influence to China and Asia. The founding figure of the University of Hong Kong, the then Hong Kong governor, Fredrick Lugard, had the following to say regarding the 'Western civilizing' mission of the University of Hong Kong not just to students in Hong Kong but also to students in China, in a letter to the Governor General of Canton in 1909:

... Soon after I came to Hong Kong the idea occurred to me, that in no way could we show our sympathy with the desire of China to educate her students in Western sciences, than by establishing here a University where students might be able to obtain degrees in no way inferior to those granted in Europe and America, and equally recognized by all nations. This would enable Chinese scholars to acquire degrees without being put to the great expense entailed by going to foreign countries. (Lugard quoted in Sweeting 1990: 281)

To realize this Western civilizing function of the University of Hong Kong, Lugard placed great emphasis on maintaining English as its medium of instruction and on importing a wholly British staff. Lugard asserted that 'it is necessary that Western knowledge should be conveyed in a Western tongue' (Chiol 1910: 174; quoted in Pennycook 1998: 120), and to enact 'moral education' '...in the Hong Kong University

the staff will be wholly British' except perhaps for a few Chinese specialists (Chirol 1910: 174; quoted in Pennycook 1998: 120). The desire to spread British linguistic, cultural and economic influence can be seen in Lugard's mission statement for the University of Hong Kong:

In conclusion I would emphasize the value of English as the medium of instruction. If we believe that British interests will be thus promoted, we believe equally firmly that graduates, by the mastery of English, will acquire the key to a great literature and the passport to a great trade. On the one hand we desire to secure the English language in the high position it has acquired in the Far East; on the other hand since the populations of the various provinces in China speak no common language, and the Chinese vocabulary has not yet adapted itself to express the terms and conceptions of modern science, we believe that should China find it necessary for a time to adopt an alien tongue as a common medium for new thoughts and expressions—as the nations of the West did when Latin was the language of the savants and of scientific literature—none would be more suitable than English. (Lugard 1910: 4; quoted in Pennycook 1998: 121)

In the above excerpt, Lugard signaled his vision of the possibility that English might come to replace other languages and his insistence that it would be through English that a secular, Western scientific and moral education could best bring civilization to people in China and the Far East. This cultural 'civilizing' function was further realized by the Hong Kong University's 'Hall culture'. Students entered into prestigious

dormitories (e.g., Morrison Hall, St. John's College, Ricci Hall) where they lived with their British residential hall masters and were acculturated into British cultural ways of being and developed strong cultural identities associated with a British university education and British life styles.

It is possible to interpret this message merely as further evidence of Lugard's cultural imperialistic views. It might, however, according to Sweeting and Vickers' analysis, be alternatively viewed as an instance of Lugard's political acumen and/or of his skills as a fund-raiser (Sweeting and Vickers 2007). Lugard's approach to the issue of medium of instruction, in Sweeting and Vickers' analysis, appeared to have been pragmatic rather than imperialistic (Sweeting and Vickers 2007). Addressing the 1912 Congress of Universities of the British Empire, Lugard alluded to criticisms of education in India:

The third criticism [of the Indian education system] refers primarily to schools for boys and condemns the sole use of English as the medium of instruction. The criticism does not apply to Universities where (as here) it is necessary that Western knowledge should be conveyed in a Western language, since there is no common dialect which is understood by all Chinese, since the Chinese language is at present incapable of expressing technical and scientific terms, and knowledge of a Western language is necessary to open up the literature of the West to the student. The importance of the study of the Chinese language and literature is, however, fully recognised. (Lugard quoted in Mellor 1992: 172)

In Sweeting and Vickers' analysis, this concern to give modern Chinese university students opportunities to acquire 'Western knowledge' was also a central concern of many Chinese reformers in the early twentieth century (Sweeting and Vickers 2007). It is thus debatable whether university education in Hong Kong had started with a merely cultural colonization desire of Britain, or also with a pragmatic function of bringing Western knowledge to China, as a response to the popular demand among many Chinese reformers for this Western knowledge. A historian of education in China and Hong Kong, Bernard Luk, points out that behind the cultural civilizing rhetoric of Lugard in 1910 were the British empire's anxieties over rising American and Japanese cultural influences and business interests in China at that time. By the early 20th century, there were many American Christian universities (set up by American missionaries) in China (e.g., in major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Canton), and in the other universities in China there were also many Japanese scholars serving as professors. Lugard seemed to be 'far-sighted' in establishing Hong Kong University in 1911 to serve as a competitor in higher education in East Asia that would aim at acculturating a group of British-university-educated Asian elite (drawing students from Hong Kong, China, Malaysia) to foster future collaborators in British colonial rule as well as to extend its political, cultural and economic influence and interest in China and the 'Far East' region (Luk 2003; personal communication with Bernard Luk, 15 July 2005).

Co-opting private Chinese-medium colleges into The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1963

Despite the lack of the British Hong Kong colonial government's support, in the period between the consolidation of the Chinese Nationalist Government in China in 1928 and its retreat to Taiwan in 1949, private Chinese-medium secondary schools rapidly outnumbered English-medium schools in Hong Kong due to the influence and support of institutions in China (see historical documentations by Cheng 1949; Wong 1982). However, after 1949, with the People's Republic of China adopting a largely self-isolationist stance towards Hong Kong and the rest of the world, graduates from Chinese-medium schools in Hong Kong could no longer go to China for university education. Many American Christian universities had, however, moved to Hong Kong after the 1949 communist takeover of China (e.g., Baptist College, Chung Chi College) and continued to attract the graduates of Chinese-medium secondary schools in Hong Kong.

To exert some control over the rising influence of these American or Taiwan-based Chinese-medium private colleges, the British Hong Kong colonial government decided to co-opt these colleges into a government-funded (and regulated) university. The Chinese University of Hong Kong was set up in 1963 by amalgamating three existing private Chinese-medium colleges, i.e. Chung Chi College, New Asia College and United College. It should be noted that the three colleges all had distinct historical roots, linked heavily to Chinese tradition, language and culture.

- a. Chung Chi College was founded in October 1951 by the representatives of Protestant Churches in Hong Kong to fulfill the need for a local institution of higher learning that would be both Chinese and Christian. The mission of the College was to provide

higher education in accordance with Christian traditions, using the Chinese language as the primary medium of instruction. It sought to promote Christian faith, learning and research but also respected Chinese language and culture.

- b. New Asia College was founded in 1949 by a famous Chinese scholar, the late Dr. Ch'ien Mu and a small group of scholars from mainland China. It aimed to preserve traditional Chinese culture and to balance it with Western learning so that students might understand their cultural heritage while being able to cope with the challenges of the modern world. It had a humble beginning but soon attracted co-operation and support both locally and from very respectable English-speaking overseas institutions such as the support of the Yale-China Association which was very active in educational development in China since 1954, the Harvard-Yenching Institute, the Asia Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the British Council, the Mencius Foundation, the Ford Foundation and so on. Links with such overseas institutions ensured that there was not just a focus on Chinese cultural heritage, but at the same time an openness to the language and culture of the West.
- c. United College was founded in 1956 through the amalgamation of five colleges: Canton Overseas, Kwang Hsia, Wah Kiu, Wen Hua, and Ping Jing College of Accountancy, which were originally private universities in Canton (now Guangzhou, China) and its vicinity, having close relations with Hong Kong. United College and its forerunners made important contributions to society in providing alternative avenues for the increasing number of Chinese-medium secondary school students to further their studies in Hong Kong. In 1959, United College together with Chung Chi and New Asia, became recognised post-secondary colleges in preparation for the

establishment of a new university and in October 1963, The Chinese University of Hong Kong was inaugurated with the amalgamation of the above three foundation colleges.

The current mission of The Chinese University of Hong Kong is “to combine tradition with modernity, and to bring together China and the West”. In Sweeting and Vickers’ analysis, the decision to set up The Chinese University of Hong Kong was:

“...certainly in part due to a desire on the part of the colonial government to exert some control over developments in higher education in Chinese—reflecting a particular concern to prevent education becoming another battleground for the Communist–Nationalist in-fighting that caused sporadic unrest within Hong Kong during the 1950s. The policy shift is also open to interpretation along more pragmatic lines. In the circumstances of the 1950s in Hong Kong, it was felt that *something* needed to be done (and, in the broader Cold War context, something needed to be *seen* to be done) about the problems of the increasing numbers of non-English speaking residents of Hong Kong, especially with regard to higher education opportunities. The University of Hong Kong solution, favoured by Keswick and his Committee, had not proved feasible. In parallel, eventually, with efforts to produce ‘bridging programmes’ that would enable the academically more successful students from Chinese Middle Schools to reach standards in English sufficient to render them eligible for admission to the University of Hong Kong, the most practical option appeared to be for the Government to approve and subsidise the best of the Chinese post-secondary colleges. This policy

orientation led eventually to the establishment of The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1963. (Sweeting and Vickers 2007: 26)

The University of Hong Kong and The Chinese University of Hong Kong were thus for three decades, from the 1960s to the 1980s, the two sole prestigious universities in Hong Kong, and they symbolized English and Chinese respectively as prestigious languages for pursuit of higher education in Hong Kong. However, since the early 1990s, this balance in linguistic symbolism was interrupted with more English-medium universities being established.

Setting up other English-medium universities in the 1990s

In the late 1980s after the signing of the Sino-British Agreement to return Hong Kong to China in 1997, Hong Kong witnessed a serious 'brain drain' problem with many local Hong Kong well-educated people emigrating to Western countries such as Canada and Australia due to political uncertainty. The Tian-an-men Square bloodshed on June 4, 1989 further aggravated the brain drain problem of Hong Kong. Hong Kong's economic structure had also been experiencing an economic shift from the labour-intensive manufacturing industry of the 1960s and 1970s to the tertiary sector of service industries. The British Hong Kong government seemed to respond to this economic shift and the brain drain problem by setting up new universities and upgrading former polytechnics and vocational institutes to universities (Sweeting 2004). The government felt that higher education needed to be expanded and a decision was made to increase the mean percentage of the relevant age group admitted to degree study from less than 3% in the

1970s and early 80s to 18% in 1994. By the late 1990s, apart from the University of Hong Kong and The Chinese University of Hong Kong, there were also six other newly-established or upgraded degree-granting tertiary institutions: Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong Lingnan University and the Hong Kong Institute of Education. The medium of instruction at all these new institutions were claimed to be English and this seems to be maintained at least in the written mode (with most written work and assessment done in English) while individual professors in different disciplines may sometimes use spoken Cantonese or Mandarin as the oral medium of instruction.

Increasing dominance of English in university education in Hong Kong since the 1990s

The cultural civilizing discourses of the early 19th century (e.g., those of Lugard and other early governors) have gradually, in the 1980s and 90s, given way to the economic and global capitalist discourses of the importance of English as an international language of business and technology, and Western sciences and information technology for maintaining Hong Kong's economic prosperity and human resource competitiveness in the global market economy. The 1997 political handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China did not witness any decolonization of the medium of instruction of university education in Hong Kong. Ironically the domination of English in the education system in Hong Kong has gained forceful renewed legitimacy when any possible post-colonial

critique of English dominance can be powerfully neutralized by the hegemonic discourses of global capitalism (Lin and Luk, 2005).

The Case of The Chinese University of Hong Kong

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) has been said to be the only university in Hong Kong that uses Chinese (realized as spoken Cantonese or Mandarin and written Modern Standard Chinese) as its medium of instruction. In fact, it turned out to face the greatest tension and the most difficult situation among the universities when having to come to grips with the medium of instruction issues at tertiary level. While the University of Hong Kong and other universities can boldly claim to use English as their medium of instruction, such moves by CUHK met with considerable resistance from its staff, students and alumni, who point to the cultural roots and the original aim for the establishment of the Chinese University. Over the years CUHK has gradually changed its medium of instruction to English in many of its popular disciplines such as the sciences, engineering, medicine and business. Since the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, there has been increasing pressure from both the Hong Kong business sector and the post-1997 government to “internationalize” CUHK by increasing the number of courses taught in English. Resistance was so great from staff and students that the latter surrounded the President’s car and called for his resignation in 2005 for his mishandling of the language issue. A Committee on Bilingualism was set up in 2005 to review the Chinese University’s language policy and make recommendations on how CUHK should uphold its long-cherished policy of bilingualism and form long-term plans to enhance bilingual education to meet the challenges facing the University. A Final Report on

Bilingualism was issued in 2007 after extensive consultation with University administrators, faculty, students, alumni and other stakeholders. The Final Report stated that

“The bilingual policy of *liangwen sanyu* (2 written systems and 3 spoken codes), adopted by CUHK for the last four decades, is a distinctive characteristic and strength of the University. The policy on bilingual education at the University and its objectives should remain unchanged.”

However, it also emphasized the importance of English:

“As a university that integrates Chinese and Western cultures, CUHK has a unique cultural mission in the current historical and social milieu. The University must be responsive to the global trend of internationalization, and must strengthen its competitiveness in the international arena. This is of paramount importance to the future of its students and to the University’s development.”

It further added that

“To be globally competitive, the University must acknowledge the importance of English as an international language. It should foster multicultural exchange and cultivate a cosmopolitan outlook among its students through a bilingual policy”.

It was thus decided that those academic subjects of a “highly universal” nature, with little emphasis on cultural specificity, such as the natural sciences, life sciences and engineering, should be taught in English. Such a decision led to a judicial review application in the Court of First Instance filed by a student who claimed that the decision to teach in English demeaned the importance of Chinese and disregarded the original

mission of the University since it was founded. The Court finally ruled that the University had no legal obligations to stick to Chinese as the medium of instruction and that the preamble of the University's founding ordinance did not mandate the University to use Chinese as the principal language of instruction, and that English could certainly be used (SCMP, February 10, 2009). This is a disappointing ruling but the fact that a single student was brave enough to file a court case against the university's language policy testifies to the tension infusing MOI issues in Hong Kong.

MOI Policies, Research Assessment Exercise, and Implications for Knowledge Production in Universities in Hong Kong

It can be seen from the above historical account that, given Hong Kong's colonial context, the role of the university seemed to be from the outset intertwined with Western and British colonial political, economic and cultural imperatives. Knowledge and civilization have been seen as originating from the West, especially Britain, and that English is seen as the proper medium for teaching, learning and exploring Western knowledge, culture and civilization. The largely British faculty of HKU in its early years ensured that this 'civilizing' mission was carried out in the hands of the British. With the co-opting of local private Chinese-medium colleges into CUHK, the original alternative space for knowledge production and alternative modes of intellectual acculturation have also been to some extent co-opted and regulated by the colonial government.

Despite these moves, the late 1970s and 1980s have witnessed more Chinese and bilingual Hong Kong scholars entering into the faculties of the various universities.

Almost 90% of those with doctorates earned them outside of Hong Kong, mainly from the West. The neo-Confucian scholars in the New Asia College of CUHK have strived to maintain their own indigenous traditions in their intellectual, teaching and research pursuits. However, with the exception of a few prestigious Hong Kong scholars, the general higher education scene has been dominated by Western faculty and Western-knowledge/epistemology-based scholarship mediated wholly in English.

There has also been a conscious attempt to increase non-local student quotas and accept international students (whose mother-tongue is not Cantonese) from 5% to 20% of the approved student number targets for 2008-09. The universities' attempt to 'market' themselves to attract overseas students further highlights the important role of English in Hong Kong universities. Local institutions have in fact set up attractive scholarships to get quality non-local students and there has certainly been a much greater presence of increasing numbers of non-local, non-Cantonese speaking students.

The expansion of university education from two universities to eight in the 1990s has brought about opportunities for a new, young generation of local Hong Kong scholars entering into the faculties of the universities. Although most of them have been trained in English and in Western countries (as this is the general recruitment policy of universities in Hong Kong), their presence in higher education stands a chance of bringing about more local scholarship and developing stronger local intellectual communities. However, coinciding with the expansion of university education is also the government's desire to follow the West in introducing both marketization and atomistic-empiricist (self)-

monitoring cultures in the form of ‘quality assurance’ management systems into the governance of university education in Hong Kong. Market ideologies stressing efficiency, accountability and cost-effectiveness emphasize Western management styles and linguistic practices that have a direct impact on the academic culture in universities. For example, research performance (e.g., in the Humanities and Social Sciences) is based on narrowly defined notions of output performance that govern research and publication practices, such as basing performance mainly on recognized Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) criteria in the government’s Research Assessment Exercise (RAE, a periodic exercise to evaluate the performance of university professors’ research output, a practice originating from Britain and spreading to Hong Kong in the 1990s). Publication practices use mostly criteria from the West and place a heavy emphasis on publishing in English in international, i.e. English, journals. Publishing in Chinese journals certainly does not carry the same weight. The penetration of university education by global management discourses and practices since the 1990s has again limited the opportunities for fostering indigenous knowledge and scholarship. Ideally, professors and students should have both international horizons and local horizons and the two should fuse and mutually benefit each other. Scholars in Asia should have a balanced approach: to teach, learn, conduct research and write academic papers in both English (for the international readership) and local languages (for the local readership) and to build knowledge with both foreign and local knowledge models. As for the medium of instruction, CUHK’s Final Report on Bilingualism (2007) states that “the choice for language of instruction should allow for flexibility, taking into account the nature of the academic subject, professional requirements, the language habits, competence and cultural backgrounds of

the students and teachers concerned, and practical needs”, and that “there can be variation among Departments in the proportion of use of Cantonese, Putonghua and English.” (The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2007). How to implement such measures and realize the goals for the production of knowledge in university education will be a matter of serious consideration. We do need to engage in critical discussion on the impact of linguistic practices on knowledge production under the Englishizing forces of globalization and internationalization and to reflect on critical issues such as: what is the role of the university in knowledge production, and what is the role of the medium of instruction in this knowledge construction process?

Habermas differentiates between different kinds of knowledge-constitutive interests (Habermas 1971). Behind the RAE quantifying measures is the modern state’s monitoring and control system derived from the empiricist-analytical interest. Commenting on the Hong Kong government’s introduction of these global (with models directly imported from Britain) management/monitoring quality assurance systems into the governance of schools in the early 1990s, Hong Kong sociologist of education, Tsang Wing-kwong, has pointed out the colonization (by the government’s techno-scientific management system) of the lifeworld of educational communities (Tsang 2006). What counts as quality education? Under the government’s empiricist-analytically based accounting/auditing system it is only those observable measures (e.g., operationalized as checklists of quantifiable indicators) that count as evidence of ‘quality work’ and ‘best practices’ of teachers and principals in schools. Extending Tsang’s analysis to the RAE we can say that what counts as the contribution of university scholars to knowledge and

society has been reduced to the mere number of publications (and in some universities, narrowly defined as in SSCI journals only).

With the empiricist-analytic knowledge-constitutive interest motivating the government's RAE control/monitoring system of university education and 'workers' therein, the worth of these workers is seen only in their display of observable indicators of performance. However, there is contribution/performance that cannot be measured under this accounting system and there is knowledge not derived from the empiricist-analytic but the historical-hermeneutic knowledge-constitutive interest. This kind of 'knowledge' cannot be measured in terms of objectified observables and it is a kind of knowledge (and action) derived from the human practical-understanding interest. For instance, scholars in the discipline of social work can contribute to the Hong Kong society much more than just publishing in dominant overseas journals which favor techno-scientific research paradigms that churn out 'knowledge' which is of no relevance to the practical needs of front-line social work practitioners in Hong Kong.

In his critique on Hong Kong government's quality-education discourses and policies on monitoring of Hong Kong schools, Tsang also uncovered another insidious effect of the colonization of our lifeworld by the techno-scientific management system: destroying the social trust between teachers and parents and disintegrating educational communities into competitive individuals (Tsang 2006). We can extend Tsang's analysis in our examination of the impact of RAE discourse and policies in higher education, when RAE criteria tend to be narrowly defined in certain local universities (e.g., especially in some universities where the science and engineering disciplines' criteria are

used as the benchmark for the humanities and social sciences). The RAE, at least as interpreted and practiced in some local universities, encourages professors to focus on writing for English-language overseas journals—not the local communities of scholars and fellow citizens. The effect is that intellectuals are encouraged to become individualistic competitive research workers, not bent on interacting with other (local) colleagues and building intellectual communities discussing topics/issues of concerns in their immediate social world. However, it must also be pointed out that some local universities have much broader criteria than others and might permit a broader range of journals than SSCI journals. So, different universities' local interpretations and practices are diverse and can offer space for local resistance.

Competitive individualism undermines the fostering of intellectual, research communities in the local society as both individual researchers and universities are incited by RAE to compete with one another for government funding. Although the Hong Kong Research Grants Council encourages cross-institution research collaboration, when it comes to calculating the volume of research grant, only the Principal Investigator (PI)'s university will be credited with the research grant, and the Co-PI's university will not be credited. Furthermore, the kinds of academic work that one can engage in become increasingly under close (self- and other-) monitoring (e.g., not to depart from RAE-defined research areas) and this can be likened to the effect of the technology of discipline exercised by the panoptic gaze (Foucault 1977). This gaze is likely to be internalized by individual researchers as these norms (e.g., what counts as valuable research output in one's annual performance appraisal) are increasingly promoted by department heads and deans in performance appraisals in some local universities. In time

the monitoring system will be internalized by individuals and we shall become embedded in networks of ‘confessional’ power relations (Foucault 1978) if we allow ourselves to be made to feel guilty for deviating from RAE norms as locally defined by senior management in the universities.

Coda: suggestions for future work

The analytical lens provided by Habermas and Foucault may be employed to sharpen our understanding of the systemic effects of global quality assurance discourses and systems on intellectual culture and communities. While it is true that some local universities are intensifying the pressures by imposing an even more narrow interpretation of RAE criteria (e.g., adopting SSCI criteria) than other local universities, there is a trend of intensifying pressures in more and more local universities by adopting mainly English-language, overseas, indexed journals as prestigious journals. Is there anything we can do about it? The views of the scholars reported above seem to converge about what can be done under such a situation and it can be summarized as follows:

1. In terms of the MOI policy issues, local scholars need to engage in a critical discussion with policy makers and the public to advocate for balanced bilingual and multilingual approaches (Lin and Man, 2009) to the MOI of universities. While globalization and internationalization discourses are usually drawn on as rationalizations for using an English-only MOI policy, other bilingual and multilingual approaches to MOI must also be considered, to ensure that the

process of knowledge production and the intellectual space are not preempted by Western discourses, knowledges and epistemologies.

2. Scholars need to engage in critical self-reflection about our own situation now, and we need to engage in discussion with other scholars in a similar situation. If we can come to reach some consensus (in a community-building, intellectual public sphere) about what we can do to avoid being dictated by such a system, we can contribute to resisting the imperatives and insidious effects of such systems; e.g., vicious internal competition fueled by the English-dominant MOI policies, and RAE and SSCI evaluation system.
3. Scholars should seek to protect the existence of the tenure system, which can allow scholars the space and autonomy to do their intellectual work and to pursue other social projects of benefit to society.
4. Scholars in Asian societies can engage in discussion of issues of their common concern and to discuss critical action plans to support one another's intellectual work; e.g., to develop high-quality regional research journals as arenas for publication of research papers about topics in Asian societies, to develop knowledge models, theories, epistemologies that are relevant to and useful in theorizing experiences and phenomena in societies in this region, and to engage in dialogue with other theories and epistemological frameworks in other parts of the world: to have both international and local horizons.

While there is still much work to do, the present discussion might serve as a starting point to get us thinking about the likely negative effects on academic culture of English-only

MOI policies and some local universities' narrow interpretation of the research performance evaluation system (e.g., imposing mainly SSCI criteria). This paper, thus, does not aim at having a definitive conclusion about what is happening in all universities in Hong Kong. Instead, by documenting the historical background of English-language dominance in higher education in Hong Kong, and bringing it to the reader in conjunction with the discussion of recent developments of MOI and RAE interpretation and practice in some local universities, this paper aims at contributing to the critical discussion both locally and regionally about what intellectuals can do to resist the potential danger of the narrowing of intellectual space and academic freedom as a result of the penetration of English-only policies which are rationalized by the globalization and internationalization discourses.

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Authors' biographies

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