Higher education in Hong Kong and the global marketplace: Policy borrowing and the occident
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Ourania Filippakou[1], Celeste Yuen[0]
[1]University of Hull, UK, [2]Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong

Abstract

This presentation embraces two inter-related objectives: to examine the current policies and strategies that are employed by Hong Kong to attract more non-local students in order to become an educational hub in the region, and critique dominant conceptions of 'higher education' and the ways these play out in higher education policy. The paper begins by examining 'markets' and how this idea cannot be separated from the global dominance of neoliberal ideologies. This is related in turn to questions of policy borrowing. The particular pertinence of this is then emphasised by turning to a topic that, although it may seem a digression, goes to the heart of thinking in social sciences: the nature of humanism in Chinese and Occidental philosophy. Finally a return is made to aspects of international higher education in order to unsettle some of the dominant patterns of influence and open the way towards different kinds of thinking.

The context

Marginson (2006) observed that higher education markets comprise at least a world-wide positional market of elite US/UK universities, which is now joined by an emerging commercial massive market. The demand for international education in Asian markets and Asia will represent some 70% of the total global demand for international education by 2025 (Bohm et *al*, 2002). China, India, and Indonesia will be most important sources of international students in 2020 (British Council, 2012), generating over half of the global demand in international higher education in the next two decades due to their booming economies (Kell & Vogl, 2010). A number of Asian countries have aspired to become regional hubs of higher education, notably Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea and Malaysia to capture this booming Asian market (Dessoff, 2012).

Hong Kong has been actively seeking ways to attract more international students since 2000 (Lai & Maclean 2011). In 2002, the government published a report on higher education in which it proposed that Hong Kong possessed the capacity to export higher education services and become an education hub in the region. Later in 2007 the Hong Kong government released its Action Agenda on China's 11th Five-Year Plan and the Development of Hong Kong, recommending the exploration of ways to attract more non-local students to study in Hong Kong and to develop Hong Kong into a regional education hub (The Hong Kong Government, 2007). In addition to the Mainland China market, the Hong Kong government is also increasingly interested in promoting their higher education services to other Asian regions. Hong Kong's entry into this new global trade of higher education services was first marked by the recruitment of students from Mainland China and mainland students still remain as the largest group of mobile students in Hong Kong. In 2013-4 student from Mainland

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China accounted for more than 70% of the approximately 14.000 non-local students in the tertiary institutes of Hong Kong (University Grants Committee, 2015).

The empirical part of this paper attempts to examine Hong Kong's higher education agenda in relation to its potential of being a regional education hub in Asia and the implications for the Hong Kong government and the higher education sector seeking to capture these increasingly growing Asian markets. The data were obtained by questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews and document analysis. The major sources of data for the questionnaire survey and the interviews were from prospective students, parents, principals, and policy makers in target markets such as India, Malaysia, and Indonesia, which are important source of international students in the region as well as Hong Kong (Yen et *al*, forthcoming). With particular, although not exclusive reference to the UK, the authors will draw attention to the politics of borrowing and lending and the processes of local adaptation and re-contextualisation of borrowed higher education reforms in an age of marketisation (cf. Phillips 2004).

Towards an intercultural conversation

Written by a cross-cultural pair of authors, the paper aims to bring together our exposure of the problems of policy borrowing and the 'occident' (cf. Chen 2002) with a critique of dominant conceptions of 'international higher education' and the ways these play out in higher education research. The experience of 'policy borrowing' and the markets, which will be illustrated with reference to Hong Kong, does not occur only between higher education in East Asia and the occident: it occurs also in a global way. *First*, there is a continuing need to be sensitised to the rhetorical inflation of present narratives of 'international higher education' and similar terms, as found, for example, in policy statements where borrowing, discursive or actual, can have a 'certification effect' on domestic policy talks (cf. Steiner-Khamski 2006). *Second*, while the worthiness and value of much of the critical work undertaken in the 'western' world cannot be doubted, its current dominant discourses are apt to hide the importance of these matters – that there is much to be learned from the different semantic fields that the Chinese can open (cf. Macfarlane 2015).

Conversation is, then, the field within which someone might discover what such a dialogic project might be. As Cavell points out: 'What it emphasizes is, I might say, the opacity, or non-transparence, of the present state of our interactions, cooperative or antagonistic—the present seen as the outcome of our history as the realization of attempts to reform ourselves in the direction of compliance with the principles of justice. The virtues most in request here are those of listening, the responsiveness to difference, the willingness for change. The issue is not whether there is a choice between the virtues of cooperation and of conversation. God forbid. The issue is what their relation is, whether one of them discourages the other' (Cavell, 2004: 173-174). Saito and Standish (2012: 9) draw attention the particular nuance of the term 'conversation' in Cavell's work: 'Cavell finds in the second syllable of 'conversation' ('vers' – reversal, diversion, averse) the suggestion of a turning of thought such that it cannot proceed solely, and in many respects does not proceed best, when it travels along straight, systematic lines: openness to conversation, a readiness to be turned (to be shaped, fashioned,

sometimes diverted, sometimes rebuffed), require that I do not seek to shore up my own identity but rather am ready for new possibilities – that is, ready to become'.

Finally it will be argued that the emancipatory politics underlying dominant paradigms of 'western' research on higher education is predicated on particular notions of human progress and a 'monolingual' mode of speaking about higher education. The dominance of particular kinds of discourse perpetuates the occident of a kind and a better – multilingual – idiom for higher education thought is required. Against this background of the standardisation of language in 'international higher education' and the collusion of higher education policy in this, this paper wishes to open up a conversation of how we might proceed otherwise.

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