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<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Chao, RY; Postiglione, GA</b>
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# **ACADEMIC PROMOTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING PERSONNEL IN HONG KONG**

**Roger Chao Jr.  
Gerard Postiglione**

Hong Kong SAR, China

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# CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND OF ACADEMIC PROMOTION

**H**ONG KONG'S historical development, including its British colonial heritage and its return to Mainland China, its reputation as an international business, finance and education centre, and it being the gateway between Mainland China and the rest of the world have influenced its higher education system, structure, and policy directives. These include higher education governance structures, increasing access and provision of public and private higher education, its directive to become a regional education hub, and a shift in academic and faculty structures, which will have implications to academic teaching staffs' workloads, appointments and promotions, and their engagements in university governance.

In line with the changes observed in East Asian higher education (Altbach and Umakoshi, 2004; Altbach and Balan, 2007; Postiglione and Mak, 1997; Postiglione, 2002), Hong Kong's higher education system has undergone expansion, increased research output, and has been increasingly focused on the race for world class status. It has also been accompanied by massive state investment, increased internationalization, privatization, the intensification of market forces and the use of managerialism in higher education governance (Chapman, Cummings and Postiglione, 2009; Postiglione and Wang, 2011).

Initially shaped by its British colonial heritage, Hong Kong's higher education sector is internationally recognized for its academic freedom, teaching and learning, and research, and its higher education qualifications (particularly the University Grants Committee (UGC) funded higher education institutions) are accepted across the world.

In fact, three UGC-funded universities, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, are ranked in Times Higher Education's top 200 universities worldwide. Two additional universities, City University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Polytechnic University, are ranked in the top 300 universities worldwide based on the latest QS rankings.

Hong Kong's UGC-funded higher education institutions have become a magnet for international academics, witnessed by its high percentage of international faculty across its UGC-funded institutions. International faculty are attracted to UGC institutions because of their internationally competitive compensation packages (facilitated by the deregulation of university pay from civil service pay since July 2003) and the opportunity to conduct research on Asia-related (particularly China) issues.

In fact, faculty remuneration in Hong Kong consists of a market and performance-based review linked to salary and salary increases, discretionary cash allowances, and in some cases a sign-on/golden handcuff bonus for key high profile international scholars. Cash allowances are discretionary, market and performance-based, and are not dependent on needs. Furthermore, they tend to be fixed for a definite period (tied with contract duration or every three years on substantiation status), renewable and reviewed at the end of each period.

Given Hong Kong's internationalization directives, the impact of marketization, and development of its higher education sector, academic promotion in Hong Kong has been changing to incorporate international practices characterized by a performance-based system focused on research, teaching and service. The high level of institutional autonomy among the UGC-funded higher education institutes (HEIs) may result in divergent academic hiring and promotion practices across institutions and even within institutions. In fact, the assessments of research outputs in different UGC-funded HEIs tend to differ in terms of accepting book chapters, monographs, policy papers, and non-indexed research articles as a faculty's research output. The general trend of international benchmarking, performance-based criteria, an increased focus on research outputs, and the use of various assessment procedures, however, tends to hold across these institutions.

Initial faculty appointments are usually granted a three-year fixed-term with an end of contract gratuity. Substantiation is required by the end of six years from the date of initial appointment. Gratuity is usually computed at fifteen percent of basic salary (excluding any allowances) earned during the employment period, less the aggregate amount of the university's contribution, as employer, to the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Ordinance over the period of service.

Academic promotion and substantiation are assessed at three different levels, namely, department, school/faculty, and institutional levels. Performance-based criteria are strictly followed, especially in research outputs and the ability to acquire research grants. In fact, if a faculty has not acquired research funds and produced the required quantity of quality research output within the designated time frame the renewal of their contract is not even considered. Substantiation ensures continuous employment until the mandatory retirement age of 60 or 65, depending on the institution, or 30 years of service whichever comes first.

## **Governance in Hong Kong's higher education system**

In line with Hong Kong's 'big market small government' policy and the global business discourse of efficiency, quality and accountability, governance of Hong Kong's higher education is often described as a top-down management style with high levels of institutional autonomy where government only exerts a moderate influence on public universities (Postiglione and Wang, 2011). The rise of managerialism worldwide, however, has weakened the influence of the faculty within Hong Kong's higher education shared governance system which has been typical for decades (Mok and Welch, 2003; Tai, Mok and Tse, 2002). As such, the professional practices, including a strong regard for academic freedom, occurring within Hong Kong's public HEIs are actually managed within a top-down governance structure (Postiglione and Wang, 2011).

Due to this management style, Hong Kong faculty members report a lack of communication with administration, feel less likely to be informed about what is going on in their institutions, and see relatively little opportunity to engage in policy-making, especially at the school/faculty and institutional levels. Their modest confidence in the

competence of administrative leadership, however, has been rising, and decisions about appointments and allocation of resources are perceived to be highly performance-based (Postiglione and Wang, 2011).

The University Grants Committee, which is an advisory body composed of academics and non-academic professionals from Hong Kong and overseas, emphasizes business-oriented values and facilitates a series of quality assurance measures that link resource allocation directly to performance of UGC-funded HEIs (Postiglione and Wang, 2011). These are done through the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), the teaching and learning quality process review (TLQPR), and the establishment of the Research Grants Council which allocates additional research funding on a competitive basis to UGC-funded HEIs.

The expansion of the higher education sector in 1989 and the SARS epidemic not only facilitated increased funding in publicly funded higher education, but also pushed HEIs to become more active in fundraising, with the Hong Kong government giving matching grants. Furthermore, the 1997/98 Asian Financial Crisis led to a cut in the budget for higher education, and an expansion of private community colleges. These facilitated a more intensified focus on quality, efficiency, financial accountability and a more market-driven approach to research and instructional services (Postiglione and Wang, 2011).

## **Increasing access and provision to higher education**

Following the establishment of the University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1911 and 1963, respectively, provision for public higher education dramatically improved with the establishment of the polytechnics and post-secondary colleges (e.g. City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong Baptist University and Lingnan University) in the mid-1980s, which were subsequently converted into universities in the 1990s. Aside from the establishment of new public HEIs, the proliferation of private degree granting HEIs, and the self-financing subsidiaries of the UGC-funded higher education institutions significantly increased the provision of higher education places in Hong Kong.

As of October 2014, there are nineteen degree awarding HEIs—up from eleven in 2002. Locally-accredited sub-degree programme



providers (including those by degree awarding HEIs) have increased from nineteen in 2002 to twenty-four in 2012 (see Table 1). There are two tiers of degree-awarding HEIs in Hong Kong. Tier 1 is defined as institutions offering research postgraduate programmes for a significant number of students in selected subject areas, and tier 2 as those offering taught and research postgraduate programmes in selected subject areas (Postiglione and Wang, 2011).

The University of Hong Kong, Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology are tier 1 institutions, while the remaining UGC-funded HEIs are classified as tier 2 institutions. The other degree-awarding HEIs are also tier 2 institutions, but are significantly smaller and are focused on teaching. Furthermore, as of 30 September 2014, there are 1,186 non-local (466 registered and 720 exempted) courses<sup>26</sup> offered through various providers which helped absorb the domestic demand for higher education and reach the Hong Kong government's target of having 60 percent of the 17 to 20 age cohort in post-secondary education (Education Bureau 2014a).

**Table 1:** Hong Kong's 19 Degree Awarding Institutions

<b>The 8 Publicly-Funded Institutions through the University Grants Committee</b>	
City University of Hong Kong	The Hong Kong Institute of Education
Hong Kong Baptist University	The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Lingnan University	The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
The Chinese University of Hong Kong	The University of Hong Kong
<b>The 10 Self-Financing Institutions</b>	
Caritas Institute of Higher Education	Hong Kong Nang Yan College of Higher Education
Centennial College	Hong Kong Shue Yan University
Chu Hai College of Higher Education	Tung Wah College

<sup>26</sup> Non-local courses offered by local providers are required to be registered unless they are collaborating with the degree-awarding HEIs where they are considered exempted non-local courses under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance effective 1997.

Hang Seng Management College	Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong, Vocational Training Council
HKCT Institute of Higher Education	The Open University of Hong Kong

### Publicly Funded Institution

Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts

Source: <http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/postsecondary/local-higher-edu/institutions/index.html>

As of 2013-2014, a total of 14,600 first-year-first-degree (FYFD) places were provided by the Hong Kong government through the eight UGC institutions. UGC-funded institutions also provide around 2,000 senior year undergraduate intake places for sub-degree programme graduates and students with other relevant qualifications. It should be noted, however, that these publicly funded places will still need to pay fifty percent of the tuition and accommodation fees.

In fact, Hong Kong has the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) administering various students financial assistance schemes to ensure that no qualified student will be denied access to tertiary education due to financial reasons. Furthermore, starting in 2008, the HKSAR Government Scholarship fund also provides scholarships to outstanding local and non-local students as one of the measures to develop Hong Kong into a regional education hub (Education Bureau 2014b).

This increased participation rate was brought about by a number of factors including Hong Kong's growing prosperity, its expansion in the 1960s and 1970s which provided universal primary and secondary education, the expansion of publicly funded higher education institutions, and the growth of private higher education over the past decades.

Along with studies abroad, increased provision facilitated the increased participation in Hong Kong higher education from one to two percent in the mid-1970s to its current rate of eighteen percent of the 17-20 age cohort based in UGC institutions, and roughly sixty percent in the entire higher education sector.

The latest UGC statistical data (Table 2) shows that total student enrollment increased from 73,552 in 2009/10 to 95,456 in 2013/14.



The shift from a three to four year undergraduate programme, which started in 2012/13, is the primary reason for the sudden and significant increase in student enrollments across the UGC-funded HEIs as seen in Table 3. Of these numbers, total non-local students account for 9,333 (12.69 percent) in 2009/10 and 14,512 (15.20 percent) in 2013/14.

Furthermore, the distribution of sub-degree, undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research postgraduate of the total student enrollment in UGC-funded HEIs has changed from 9.53 percent, 76.97 percent, 4.91 percent and 8.60 percent in 2009/10 to 7.12 percent, 81.94 percent, 3.59 percent and 7.35 percent in 2013/14, respectively. In fact, FYFD student enrollments (full-time equivalent) in UGC-funded HEIs (Table 3) have actually increased from 15,729 in 2009/10 to 17,089 in 2013/14, while senior intake increased from 2,146 to 3,303, respectively.

Lastly, the distribution of student enrollment in UGC-funded HEIs by academic programmes (Table 4) shows an increasing trend towards medicine, dentistry and health, sciences, social sciences, arts and the humanities, while engineering and technology, business and management, and education have been decreasing since 2012/13. The recent shift in the distribution in student enrollment by academic programmes may have been influenced by Hong Kong's higher education shift in academic structure (as discussed later in this section), which increased its focus on liberal education. Further studies need to be undertaken to validate this trend as the possibility of students shifting to another major after their first or even second year of undergraduate education remains a possibility. However, it is likely that this recent trend will impact future hiring and promotion decisions for academics in Hong Kong.

**Table 2:** Student head count (UGC Funded HEIs)

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Total enrollment	73,552	74,588	75,597	93,394	95,456
Sub-Degree	7,009	6,983	6,927	6,503	6,797
Undergraduate	56,610	57,565	58,412	76,351	78,219
Taught Postgraduate	3,611	3,578	3,686	3,721	3,426
Research Postgraduate	6,322	6,482	6,572	6,819	7,014
Total Non-Local	9,333	10,074	10,770	13,661	14,512

Mainland China	8,429	8,724	8,936	10,963	11,376
Asia (less Mainland China)	596	950	1,355	2,105	2,494
Rest of the World	308	400	478	593	642

Source: UGC statistical data

**Table 3:** FYFD student head count (UGC Funded HEIs)

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Student Enrollment (full-time equivalent)	15,729	15,960	16,354	33,073	17,089
Senior Intake	2,146	2,200	2,288	2,724	3,303

Source: UGC statistical data

**Table 4:** Student Enrollment by Academic Programmes (UGC Funded HEIs)

Head count (% of total)	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Total Enrollment	73,552	74,588	75,597	93,394	95,456
Medicine, Dentistry and Health	6,780 (9.22%)	7,048 (9.45%)	7,389 (9.77%)	9,742 (10.43%)	10,081 (10.56%)
Sciences	11,844 (16.10%)	12,031 (16.13%)	12,247 (16.20%)	15,486 (16.58%)	16,300 (17.08%)
Engineering and Technology	14,786 (20.10%)	14,818 (19.87%)	15,076 (19.94%)	17,952 (19.22%)	17,533 (18.37%)
Business and Management	14,171 (19.27%)	14,181 (19.01%)	14,013 (18.54%)	17,243 (18.46%)	17,060 (17.87%)
Social Sciences	9,423 (12.81%)	9,571 (12.83%)	9,580 (12.67%)	12,108 (12.96%)	12,651 (13.25%)
Arts and Humanities	9,613 (13.07%)	9,611 (12.89%)	9,677 (12.80%)	12,439 (13.32%)	13,423 (14.06%)
Education	6,935 (9.43%)	7,330 (9.83%)	7,614 (10.07%)	8,424 (9.02%)	8,408 (8.81%)

Source: UGC statistical data

## Regional education hub

In 2002, UGC (2002) advanced the idea of making Hong Kong a regional education hub, a term that later appeared in the Chief Executive's 2004 policy address that promoted Hong Kong as a "World City" (Chief Executive of Hong Kong, 2004). It aimed to take advantage of Hong Kong's internationalized higher education, its strong links with Mainland China and its competitive advantage as a global centre for China-related studies, supporting the needs and benefits of further integration, more engagement and awareness with and about Mainland China (University Grants Committee 2010: 69-70). As such, the regional education hub directive should be seen in terms of Hong Kong's need to sustain its economic growth, recruit skilled and competent manpower and further integrate with Mainland China (Chao, 2012).

In fact, Hong Kong's ability to attract a steady supply of skilled, competent and educated domestic and foreign talent, foreign investments, and nurture entrepreneurs, is tied to its ability to benefit from its social, economic and political ties with Mainland China, the world's second largest economy. As such, absorbing the domestic demand for higher education, attracting foreign students and faculty, and offering a favorable environment for students, employees, and foreign enterprises are deemed essential for Hong Kong, and the regional education hub directive is one of the key strategies to achieve the above objectives.

## Shift in academic and faculty structures

Over the past decade, however, Hong Kong higher education has shifted towards the American academic model, including the undergraduate degree structure, credit unit system, faculty ranks, and the incorporation of liberal arts courses as part of the degree requirement. The education system with six years of primary, three years of junior secondary and three years of senior secondary education, followed by a four-year undergraduate degree, aligns Hong Kong's academic structure with both the US and Mainland China. Although Hong Kong's Education Bureau – Curriculum Development Institute (2010) states that the rationale for incorporating a more liberal education is that it democratizes access to higher education, we need to look deeper to see if it does serve that purpose or if there are other rationales for such development.

Furthermore, Hong Kong universities faculty ranks and structure have also shifted from the British academic structure (e.g. lecturer, senior lecturer, reader, professor) to a more American academic structure (e.g. assistant professor, associate professor, professor, chair professor). Following international higher education trends, there has been an increasing focus on research productivity, outcomes-based teaching and learning, the use of student-based teaching evaluations, and community (e.g. administrative and community-based) service.

It should be noted, that Hong Kong's new academic system was preceded by its directive to become a regional education hub in the 2002 and the 2004 memoranda of mutual recognition of degrees between Mainland China and Hong Kong (Education Bureau, 2004). As such, it can be suggested that Hong Kong's regional education hub directive and the shift in academic and faculty structures are focused on a strategic alignment with Mainland China's higher education system rather than just a drive for increased internationalization with Hong Kong's commercial, economic, political and social interests in mind (Chao, 2012).

## **Faculty and working conditions**

The international faculty of UGC HEIs has been acknowledged to be a key strength, especially in terms of Hong Kong's internationalization initiatives and its drive to become a regional education hub (University Grants Committee 2010). In fact, UGC (2010) asserts that a good mix of academics (those who earned their doctorates abroad, those who worked in universities abroad and those whose ethnic origins are not in Hong Kong) is needed by Hong Kong and encourages its UGC-funded HEIs to maintain its international mix of faculty. However, the hiring of academic staff is still done on the basis of merit. There are no policies for preferential hiring of overseas academic staff aside from having no barriers to hiring foreign academics. The international experience, natural insertion into international networks, and its ability to serve as an immediate example of internationalization within Hong Kong's higher education sector were the three reasons presented as immediate benefits of an international faculty and seen as a precursor to the creation of an internationalized learning environment.

In the same report, UGC recognized the challenges of maintaining an international mix of academics given the highly competitive

international market for academics, and understood the need to offer terms and conditions of academic employment similar to those in other countries, including the level of salaries and housing allowances. It specifically mentioned that the delinking of university salaries from civil service in 2003 was done to facilitate increasing the attractiveness of UGC-funded HEIs to international academics who are perceived to help raise the institutions international reputation and their ability to attract non-local students. On the other hand, this also creates a very competitive performance-based work environment and promotion system where only the best performers attain tenure in the some of the world's best universities. Recent years have seen a growing obstacle to the hiring of international academic staff, namely, the astronomical price of living accommodations, with Hong Kong ranked second in the world after Monaco in terms of the cost of accommodations. Furthermore, beginning in September 2014, the blocking of streets in the central financial district by the student democracy movement and clashes with police created new concerns about how this might affect the recruitment and retaining of international academic staff.

Given UGC's views on an international mix of faculty, an increasing number of Hong Kong academics have earned their doctorate in Hong Kong (Table 5). Nevertheless, those who earned their doctorates in the United States and the United Kingdom still constitute the bulk of the academic profession in Hong Kong. In fact, most of the academics who originated from Mainland China earned their doctorates in the United States (RIHE 2008, p. 230). A closer look into this phenomenon in relation to academic hiring starting from the mid-2000s could prove to be insightful to understand the UGC-funded sector's academic hiring policies and practices.

**Table 5:** Where Hong Kong Academics earned their Doctorates

	1993	2007
Hong Kong	10	25.7 to 26.5
United States	39	27.6 to 28.5
United Kingdom	27	20.7 to 21.5
Elsewhere	24	23.5 to 26
Number	(249)	(648 to 670)

Source: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, The International Survey of the Academic Profession, 1991-93, and CAP 2007 Survey Hong Kong (RIHE 2008, Table 1, p. 230)



Based on the latest UGC statistics (see Table 6 below), there are a total of 9,373 academic and research staff as of 2013-2014, distributed as senior academic staff (1,884), junior academic staff (3,227), academic supporting staff (2,568) and technical research staff (1,693), representing roughly 20.1 percent, 34.4 percent, 27.4 percent, and 18 percent of the total, respectively. Academic staff has increased by 5.19 percent (252 head count) from 2009/10 to 2013/14. As seen in Table 4, junior academic staff, however, remains at almost one-third (ranging 62.5 percent to 63.94 percent) of the total academic staff during the academic years 2009/10 to 2013/14. Furthermore, while the percentage of academic support staff to academic staff has increased from 45.71 percent in 2009/10 to 50.24 percent in 2013/14, the percentage of technical research staff to academic staff has actually deteriorated from 40.79 percent to 33.12 percent during the same period.

Given the competitive nature of Hong Kong's higher education, it is not surprising that its academic staff report relatively high workloads in teaching, research, administration, and service activities. According to the CAP 2007 study, the average working hours of Hong Kong academics are 52 hours and 50.2 hours when classes are in session and not in session, respectively (RIHE 2008, p. 233). Based on the study, an average of 19.9 hours and 7.6 hours are allocated for teaching, 16 hours and 25.7 hours are allocated for research, and 8.5 hours and 8.6 hours are allocated to administration when classes are in session and not in session, respectively. Furthermore, an average of 4 hours and 4.4 hours are allocated to service-oriented activities when classes are in session and not in session, respectively. The total working hours reported are generally higher than most of the counterparts in the other countries surveyed.

The shift in academic structure from a three to four-year undergraduate programme and the increase in undergraduate student enrollments also have implications on the hiring and promotion of academic staff. Table 6 also shows that total academic staff in UGC-funded HEIs increased from 4,834 in 2011/12 to 5,094 and 5,111 in 2012/13 and 2013/14, respectively. Furthermore, there was an increase of 79 and 47 in senior academic staff in 2012/13 and 2013/14, respectively, representing promotions (after accounting for retirements) given the 260 and 17 increase in total academic staff in the same period. In fact, the reduction of 30 junior academic staff in 2013/14 further confirms the promotions



and the effect of the shift in academic structure in the hiring and promotion of academic staff in UGC-funded HEIs.

**Table 6:** Academic and Research Staff of UGC HEIs (wholly funded by General Funds)

	Academic Year				
	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Total	9,062	8,642	8,460	9,088	9,373
Senior Academic Staff	1,753	1,790	1,758	1,837	1,884
Junior Academic Staff	3,106	2,995	3,076	3,257	3,227
Total Academic Staff	4,859	4,785	4,834	5,094	5,111
Academic Supporting Staff	2,221	2,057	2,070	2,488	2,568
Technical Research Staff	1,982	1,800	1,556	1,506	1,693
Total Academic Support and Technical Research Staff	4,203	3,857	3,626	3,994	4,261

Source: latest UGC statistical data

**Table 7:** Distribution of Academic, Technical and Research Support staff (UGC Funded HEIs)

% increase (decrease)	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Academic Staff		(1.53%)	1.02%	5.38%	0.33%
Jr./total Academic Staff	63.92%	62.59%	63.63%	63.94%	63.14%
Academic Support/ Academic Staff	45.71%	42.99%	42.82%	48.84%	50.24%
Technical Research/ Academic Staff	40.79%	37.62%	32.19%	29.56%	33.12%

Source: calculations by authors based on UGC statistical data

## Institutional autonomy

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned developments in Hong Kong's higher education sector, UGC-funded HEIs in particular have a high level of institutional autonomy. In fact, UGC's intermediary role between government and the governing bodies of UGC-funded HEIs does not impede their institutional autonomy aside from the consideration of funding dependence.

Each of the eight UGC-funded HEIs is a statutory autonomous corporation with their own ordinance (see Table 8), which may only be amended by the legislative council of Hong Kong. These ordinances provide for the governing structure, the vesting of particular powers and functions in the officers, the establishment of faculties and institutes, the appointment and termination of staff, and the power to confer degrees and to make statutes (or rules) for the institutions (University Grants Committee, 2010; Chau, 2007).

Although the above-mentioned ordinances differ in scope and content, each of the eight UGC-funded HEIs has a council as the supreme governing body with a court performing in an advisory role and a senate regulating academic matters. As such, UGC-funded HEIs have substantial autonomy, including in the selection of academic (and non-academic) staff, their promotion, substantiation and remuneration, the acceptance and rejection of students, institutional governance and management, and the determination of curricula and setting of standards.

**Table 8:** UGC-funded HEIs ordinances

City University of Hong Kong Ordinance (Cap. 1132)
Hong Kong Baptist University Ordinance (Cap. 1126)
Lingnan University Ordinance (Cap. 1165)
The Chinese University of Hong Kong Ordinance (Cap. 1109)
The Hong Kong Institute of Education Ordinance (Cap. 444)
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University Ordinance (Cap. 1075)
The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Ordinance (Cap. 1141)
University of Hong Kong Ordinance (Cap. 1053)

Source: Chau, 2007

Although constrained by financial dependence on the public purse, their ability to set up self-financing subsidiaries and affiliates, receive donations, engage in public-private partnership, engage in entrepreneurial activities (such as the commercialization of knowledge, and establishing spin-off enterprises) and offer consultancy services to industry and other organizations reduce their financial dependency on government funding. Furthermore, institutional autonomy even extends to the use of government funding with its system of triennial budgeting where UGC-funded HEIs have the discretion to deploy

government subvention and fee income as they see fit, subject to proper accountability (Chau, 2007). As such, each UGC-funded HEI, rather than the government or UGC determines its own criteria for promotion, subject to their individual needs and financial constraints. Furthermore, schools/faculties and departments can develop their own criteria for performance reviews and assessments to supplement those advanced at the university level.

Although the University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and City University of Hong Kong (and probably the other UGC-funded HEIs) have implemented an annual performance review process as part of its performance-based remuneration, promotion and substantiation process, it should be noted that this is due to their benchmarking to international practices and approved by their respective university councils. In general, the forty percent teaching, forty percent research and twenty percent service allocation for performance assessment holds across the UGC-funded HEIs.

The above presented context and development of Hong Kong's higher education, especially in the UGC-funded sector, has ensured the protection of academic freedom, increased access and participation in higher education, and enhanced the internationalization of Hong Kong's higher education sector. Its governance structure, which grants high levels of institutional autonomy to UGC-funded HEIs, the shift in its academic structure and faculty ranks, and its focus on internationalization and becoming a regional education hub have helped drive four of Hong Kong's UGC-funded HEIs (University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and City University of Hong Kong) into the top 200 of the Times Higher Education world rankings in September 2013 (Postiglione, 2014).

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# NATIONAL/SYSTEM POLICY OBJECTIVES AND THEIR IMPACT ON ACADEMIC PROMOTION

**A**S DISCUSSED above, Hong Kong’s current national policy goals include the internationalization of its higher education sector, establishing itself as a regional education hub, shifting its academic structure from a three-year to a four-year undergraduate structure with a focus on liberal and general education, and establishing its niche in the global higher education by having world class universities. Increased competition in the global higher education market and Hong Kong’s need to ensure an ongoing supply of skilled and competent human capital have forced its hand in ensuring increased participation, internationalization, and joining the race for world class universities. In fact, UGC objectives, which are stated in its website and presented below, confirm the above-mentioned policy goals.

- a. Sees Hong Kong’s higher education sector serving as the “higher education hub in the region” driving forward the economic and social development of Hong Kong, in the context of our special relationship with Mainland China and the region;
- b. Takes a strategic approach to Hong Kong’s higher education system, by developing an interlocking system where the whole higher education sector is viewed with one force, with each institution fulfilling a unique role, based on its strengths;
- c. Works with institutions to ensure that each provides quality teaching in all areas relevant to its role;
- d. Aims to promote “international competitiveness” where it occurs in institutions, understanding that all will contribute

to this endeavour and that some institutions will have more internationally competitive centres than others; and

- e. Values a role driven yet deeply collaborative system of higher education where its institution has its own role and purpose, while at the same time being committed to extensive collaboration with other institutions in order that the system can sustain a greater variety of offerings at a high level of quality and with improving efficiency.

Source: <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/policy/policy.htm>

UGC-funded HEIs are governed and funded based on performance-based assessments taking into consideration international benchmarks and increasingly focused on research productivity, internationalization and teaching efficiency. At the UGC level, the RAE and the TLQPR are increasingly linked to quality reviews of UGC-funded HEIs, and have implications to their funding. At the institutional level, assessment exercises, such as student teaching and learning assessments and peer review of teaching, are becoming a mainstay of institutional level assessment exercises and have implications to individual faculty promotions and substantiation decisions.

Internationalization of faculty has shifted to incorporate a focus on senior Chinese diaspora, diversification of ethnic background, the geographical location of their doctorate studies, and an increasing trend of faculty who finished their doctorates in Hong Kong. International collaboration in research and increased international networking has also been encouraged to increase the international profile of the Hong Kong higher education sector especially for UGC-funded HEIs.

Essentially, national policy objectives can be summarized as the establishment of an inter-locked international higher education system of world class quality with increasing effectiveness of resource utilization to support Hong Kong's economic and social development. In terms of academic hiring, promotions and substantiation, this translates to institutional resource capacity which involves resource allocation from government, their ability to attract research funds from the public and private sectors (locally and internationally), their self-funding arms, and private sector philanthropy. Institutional autonomy across the UGC-funded HEIs also ensures their ability to price remuneration of faculties based on their qualifications and reputation, taking advantage



of their respective institutions international reputation, resource capacity, and requirements in relation to their respective missions and objectives.

## **Mapping significant issues related to academic promotion**

Given Hong Kong's reputation for transparency and accountability, Hong Kong's UGC-funded HEIs have been very transparent in terms of individual rights and freedoms, the faculty and staff's conditions of employment, promotions, and remuneration. Information is usually presented in the institution's intranet, and in various seminars conducted to inform new faculty of their respective university's policies and regulations, including academic appointments, promotions and substantiation. Furthermore, a handbook, guideline and/or manual have been developed and distributed to university faculty and staff providing increased transparency of their individual roles and responsibilities, and the various appointment, promotion and substantiation procedures, the criteria used, timelines, and the grievance mechanisms available.

According the CAP 2007 study, male faculty make up the majority of Hong Kong HEIs with 67.3 percent men and 32.7 percent women. Although the proportion of women faculty in Hong Kong has been increasing from 24.6 percent in 1993, 28.6 percent in 1999, and 32.7 percent in 2007, men are four times more likely to be full professors (RIHE 2008, p. 231). A review of promotion guidelines of four UGC-funded HEIs (HKU, HKUST, CityU and HKBU) does not show discrimination based on gender. Formal and informal discussions focused on gender issues in Hong Kong's higher education sector present the need to revisit gender-related working conditions and promotion procedures.

Hong Kong's Equal Opportunity Commission, which was set up in 1996, implements the territories various ordinances against sex discrimination, disability, family status and race, which came into force in 1996, 1997 and 2007, respectively, and promotes equal opportunities between men and women, including in the higher education sector. Given protections accorded by various Hong Kong legislations, it is safe to assume that terms and conditions of women, disabled and part-time workers remain decent, but their actual implementation towards real equality needs further study.



## Managerial considerations

Reflecting Hong Kong's international reputation of professionalism and transparency, Hong Kong's UGC-funded HEIs operate on a high degree of professionalism and transparency. Procedures for appraisal, accountability, discipline and dismissal are explicitly presented in their respective intranets and faculty/employees handbooks, while grievance mechanisms are also in place in the various UGC-funded HEIs.

With Hong Kong's HEIs well-endowed with resources to support professional practice in teaching and research, faculty members are satisfied with the physical resources (e.g. classrooms, laboratories, libraries, computers, and research equipment). Challenges in public funding and the increased focus on managerialism and efficiency, however, may have resulted in a decreased level of satisfaction as reported in the latest CAP 2007 study relative to its earlier surveys (RIHE 2008, p. 233-234).

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# STRUCTURE AND CRITERIA FOR ACADEMIC PROMOTION

**T**HE ACADEMIC hierarchy in Hong Kong UGC-funded HEIs (Table 9) typically follows a linear career path starting with assistant professor progressing to associate professor and finally to the level of professor. A Ph.D. is required for all the above-mentioned positions. A range of minimum requirements differs at the various academic levels (Table 9). These requirements typically follow international minimum requirements in developed countries academic hierarchy which takes into consideration teaching, research and service related criteria.

The positions of lecturer and teaching fellow are used to accommodate Ph.D. candidates and recent Ph.D. graduates who want to focus solely on teaching, but who are usually not considered part of the academic progression track. On the other hand, the research assistant professor position, which requires a Ph.D., is solely focused on research activities and will need to progress within the normal academic track of assistant professor, associate professor, and professor, respectively.

**Table 9:** Typical academic career progression track in Hong Kong

Rank	Typical requirements	Promotion
Professor	High proficiency in teaching and research Significant contributions/impact on his/her field National/international leading scholar reputation (in addition to those of an Associate Professor)	

Associate Professor	Extensive successful evidence of teaching Scholarly/professional production/achievement in teaching and research  (in additional to those of an Asst. Professor)	Within 3 to 6 yrs. of Asst. Professorship
Asst. Professor/ Research Asst. Professor <sup>27</sup>	Ph.D. Demonstrated promise of high level ability in teaching and research	2-3 yrs. initial appointment (6-7 yrs. max)
Lecturer/Teaching Fellow	Usually Ph.D. candidates/Ph.D. who want to focus solely on teaching	

Source: adapted from various UGC-funded HEIs staff handbooks

## Criteria for academic promotion

As presented in Table 9, the minimum criteria for academic promotion are focused on teaching, research and service, and for the professor level a strong national and international scholarly reputation. For the assistant professor level, the focus is on teaching and research, with service taken as a plus factor. At the associate professor level, it is required that the applicant for promotion has demonstrated a high level of teaching and research which are normally based on teaching assessments and research productivity. Furthermore, the applicant's service to the general public, academic community and the university is also required to successfully be promoted to the associate professor level. Evidence of national and international scholarly reputation is needed for appointment to the professor level. It necessitates significant contribution to their field of specialization, evidence of excellent teaching, and service to society, university and the academic community. It is also typical to require three or four external assessments from key scholars in the applicant's respective field of specialization, especially during the substantiation process. A peer review process is also typical in the academic promotion process in Hong Kong.

## Implications of evaluation criteria

The clear, structured, and transparent evaluation criteria, which are benchmarked against international academic promotion practices, support a highly competitive work environment for academic staff,

<sup>27</sup> Research Assistant Professor positions are only focused on research.

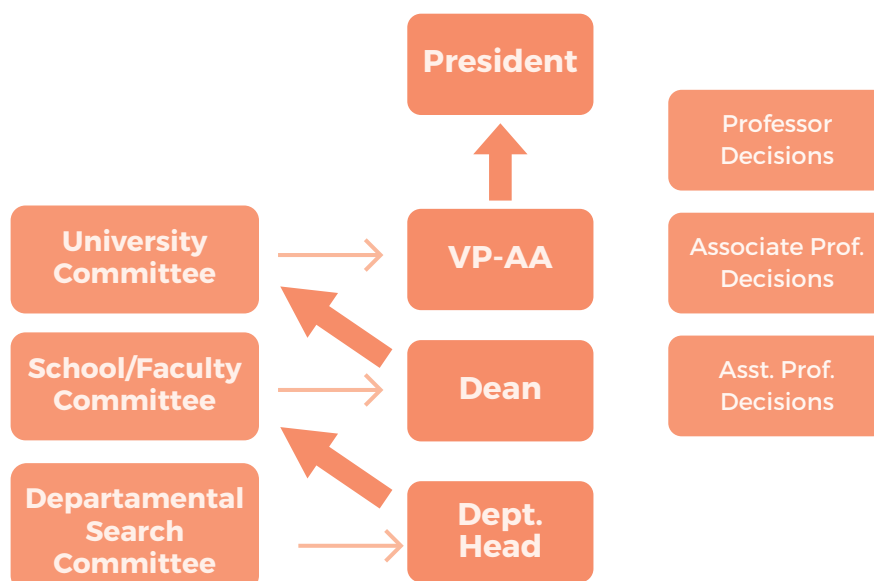
and facilitate the various UGC-funded HEIs capacity to achieve their missions. It also drives increased professionalism and performance in their academic faculty. Such a highly competitive work environment, however, tends to motivate high performers and demotivate the average and poor performers, especially with increased focus on research productivity as a basis for re-appointments, promotions and substantiation.

The annual assessments and the tedious tasks required in applications for promotions and substantiation may reduce faculty morale, especially when receiving negative feedback on their application. Depending on their respective institutions, these applicants may reapply for promotion and substantiation using the same documents subject to time limits (e.g. less than two years from last assessment) and key improvements in performance as in the case of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

# EVALUATION AND RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

**B**ASED ON the above-presented criteria, evaluation and recruitment procedures go through the typical academic appointment and promotion review process (Figure 1) with three committees. It starts with the departmental search committee and the department head giving his/her own assessment both of which will be submitted to the school/faculty committee. The dean decides on appointments for assistant professors based on his own assessment and recommendations of the departmental search committee, department head and school/faculty committee. For associate professor and above decisions, the earlier recommendations will be forwarded to the university committee, where the vice-president for academic affairs decides on associate professor levels, and forwards his own and earlier recommendations to the president for decisions on the professor level.

**Figure 1:** Typical Academic Appointment and Promotion



It should be noted that each of these three committees has a specific role, dependent on the institution. The appointing authority for the different academic levels may also differ per institution. At the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the appointing authority for the positions of assistant professor, associate professor and professor are the Dean, Vice-President for Academic Affairs and the President, respectively.

Due to the increased focus on internationalization, UGC-funded HEIs academic appointment and promotion practices have a tendency towards convergence. However, their terms and conditions, including remuneration and benefits, differ across institutions. It is noteworthy that lesser ranked UGC-funded HEIs tend to offer better remuneration and benefit packages to compensate for their lower ranking and in doing so attract key scholars.

## Evaluation procedures

Hong Kong's UGC-funded HEIs evaluation procedures consist of a mix of peer review, external assessment, and key performance indicators on teaching, research and service. Although there are discussions on the relevance and effectiveness of the various assessment instruments used (especially student teaching and learning assessments), the evaluation procedures not only broaden the stakeholders engaged in the assessment, but also provide feedback for faculty, and insights for further quality enhancements in teaching, research and service. Furthermore, the multiple level assessment process (departmental, school/faculty and university levels) ensures a fair and objective assessment procedure which considers assessments by the applicant's peers in the approving authority's decisions.

The clear and transparent criteria used in the evaluation process already guides potential applicants in their career development. Annual performance evaluations further enhances the various UGC-funded HEIs feedback mechanism to potential applicants for promotion and substantiation. Lastly, the applicant's ability to acquire the relevant review documents and their right to appeal decisions enhances the transparency and professionalism in Hong Kong HEIs evaluation procedures for academic appointments, promotions and substantiation.



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# CONCLUDING REMARKS

**W**ITHIN THE changing world order characterized by increasing globalization, the academic profession has been changing over the past decades, incorporating their respective countries historical development, academic, economic, political, social challenges and needs, and Hong Kong's higher education sector is no exception. The challenges of maintaining its economic competitiveness, political integration with Mainland China, and meeting the social demands for higher education by its populace have shaped Hong Kong's higher education policy directives, which include changing its governance structure, increasing access and provision of higher education, increasing internationalization, becoming a regional education hub, and shifting its academic structure and faculty ranks towards a more American model.

The fact that Hong Kong's UGC-funded HEIs are governed with their own individual ordinances grants them a high degree of institutional autonomy within a top-down hierarchy that imposes modest government intervention regarding faculty recruitment, appointments, promotions and substantiation. Although this governance arrangement should result in divergent institutional practices for academic appointment and promotion, international benchmarking of standards and practices has resulted in a convergence of practices across UGC-funded HEIs. This has developed into an accountable, performance-based and transparent system which, in general, does not discriminate by sex, disability, family status, or race, and has clear and explicitly presented criteria for appointments, promotions and substantiation.

Hong Kong's UGC-funded HEIs academic appointment and promotion system also incorporates the use of various assessment tools, encourages a broader participation in the assessment procedure, and ensures that decisions are made fairly through its three tier (department, school/faculty and university level) review committees. Its academic appointment and promotion system has incorporated grievance mechanisms, which enable the applicant who received negative results to acquire the review documents, and even use the same documents in subsequent applications subject to certain conditions and time limits.

It should be noted that the UGC-funded HEIs individual ordinances facilitate divergence in appointment and promotion practices, but increased international benchmarking and the need to maintain an international mix of faculty has been converging their respective practices.

Relevant key issues in Hong Kong's academic appointment and promotions system include its low (but increasing) level of women faculty, especially at the full professor level, the lack of gender, disability, family status and race specific policies outside of equality and discrimination, and the recent trend of deteriorating technical research support as seen in Table 7. Further issues which may influence future changes in Hong Kong's academic appointment and promotion is the recent trend of hiring faculty who acquired their doctorates in Hong Kong, and the sudden increase of faculty and promotion to senior academic posts brought about by the shift in Hong Kong's academic structure.

These are caused, in part, by challenges in public funding, the sector's increasing managerialism, and the highly competitive and performance-based work environment across UGC-funded HEIs. Furthermore, even though there is a consensus on the capacity and professionalism of university administration, the lack of communication between faculty and administration, and their minimal involvement in policy-making at the school/faculty and university level may have future implications to the former's satisfaction in future changes in the academic appointment and promotions system.

Notwithstanding these relevant issues, the above-mentioned developments and practices have preserved institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and facilitated having three UGC-funded

HEIs in the top 200 of the 2014 Times Higher Education World University Rankings. It is apparent that Hong Kong's continuing ability to attract and retain an international mix of quality academics reflects the quality, transparency and acceptability of its academic appointment and promotion system and practices, despite its challenges. This highly performance-based system, creates a very competitive work environment and increases stress levels, especially during re-appointment, promotion and substantiation assessment periods, often resulting in loss of employment to those not meeting its internationally benchmarked criteria.

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### **Roger Y. Chao Jr.**

Mr. Roger Y. Chao Jr. has a PhD in Asian and International Studies from the City University of Hong Kong. He is currently a Senior Consultant for the International Centre for Higher Education Innovation, a UNESCO Category 2 Centre. He was formerly the higher education specialist for UNESCO Myanmar, and has continued to be engaged

in various consultancies with UNESCO. He has actively been publishing on regionalization and internationalization of higher education, higher education policies, comparative and international education, and sociology of education in various platforms including international peer-reviewed journal, edited volumes, and international media.

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### **Gerard A. Postiglione**

Mr. Gerard A. Postiglione is Chair Professor of Higher Education, and former associate dean in the Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong. He published over 150 journal articles and book chapters, and 16 books. He has been a consultant for Asian Development Bank, United National Development Programme, Organization of Economic Cooperation and

Development, World Bank, and other agencies. His recent books include Shin, J. C., Postiglione, G. A., & Huang F. T. (ed.). and Mass higher education development in East Asia: Strategy, quality, and challenges, and Postiglione, G. A. & Jung, J. (ed.). The changing academic profession in Hong Kong: Governance, productivity, and global integration.