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Hong Kong Expanding Tertiary System

by Glenn Shive, Ph.D.

Hong Kong is still trying to regain its equilibrium from the June 4 trauma in Tiananmen Square. As the Chinese army crushed the democracy movement in Beijing in June 1989, it also shook the confidence of many Hong Kong people in their future under PRC sovereignty, which will begin in 1997. China's promise of autonomy and rule-of-law now appears to some Hong Kong people as a sham, a bargaining ruse that delivered Hong Kong from the British.

Two major disappointments last fall further eroded confidence. First, the Basic Law, drafted under tight constraints from Beijing, allowed less local autonomy than had been hoped for to post-1997 Hong Kong. Secondly, it became clear that Great Britain would offer passport protection to far fewer people in the twilight of its colony than had been expected.

Hong Kong's paradox was that people wanted foreign passports so they would not have to leave Hong Kong. Only with the security of knowing they could leave after 1997 if things turned out badly, could they feel confident to stay in Hong Kong through 1997 and help make the transition work. Even the security of acquiring a foreign passport has been shaken by Beijing's announcement that after 1997, such passports from Britain or anywhere else would not be considered valid travel documents. Hong Kong recipients of such passports would first have to renounce their Chinese citizenship before they could use foreign passports to leave Hong Kong. Beijing also said that after 1997, local people with foreign passports would not enjoy consular protection in Hong Kong and could not occupy key government positions.

Uneasiness Prompts a Brain Drain

So people have begun to leave. In 1989, about 55,000 people emigrated from Hong Kong. About half of the emigrants are so-called PTMA's (professional, technical, managerial, and administrative). Their age is often between 25 and 39. They account for only 10 percent of the work force, but for about 60 percent of the emigration. PTMAs take a long time to create, and they are most difficult to replace. They tend to have a university education, either in Hong Kong or abroad, and are therefore more capable of transferring their skills overseas. Many of them are graduates of American universities.

Hong Kong's Chinese have always valued higher education. Enhanced international mobility is now an even greater incentive to pursue further studies either locally or overseas. Canada is the most common destination of choice (44 percent); Australia is second (25 percent); the U.S. ranks third with 16 percent. The U.K., New Zealand, and Singapore each received 4 percent.

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Sprawling over the eastern half of South America, this fifth largest country in the world has great contrasts in wealth and educa-



tional opportunities among its urban and rural areas.

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"The selection process should weed out those who, after three days of tropical heat and no water, will run screaming to the nearest long distance telephone..."

One researcher of the brain drain estimates that if things settle down in China and the economy of Hong Kong continues to prosper, the annual rate of emigration could be about 75,000 people between 1990 and 1994, with a surge from 1995 to 1997. This could mean a loss of 13 percent, or 700,000, of Hong Kong's population of 5.5 million by 1997. A more conservative estimate would yield a total loss to emigration of 10 percent of Hong Kong's population by 1997. At least half of these people would be considered important to the economy and the vital functioning of the society.

Economy Changing

The migration of Hong Kong professionals comes just as Hong Kong's economy is making the transition from dominance in manufacturing to new dynamism in the services sector.

Hong Kong's GDP grew at a compounded rate of over 8 percent per year during the last two decades. Forty percent of China's exports go out through Hong Kong, which has become the 11th largest trading nation and fourth largest financial center in the world. The United States has \$US 6 billion invested in Hong Kong, more than twice its investments in the People's Republic of China, and does US\$16 billion of trade with the tiny territory.

With no natural resources, Hong Kong's single economic asset is people. Even without the brain drain, Hong Kong would have a labor shortage. The out-migration of talent exacerbates the problem just as Hong Kong shifts, along with the other small dragons of Asia, toward a more high-technology, information-based service economy.

Tertiary Education Expanding "Hugely"

The combination of brain drain and expanding service economy has prompted the Hong Kong government to undertake a huge expansion of tertiary education in the next four years.

The goal is to double the number of undergraduate university places by the fall of 1994. In the fall of 1990, Hong Kong has places for 7,000 freshmen, or only about 7 percent of this age group. That number will expand to 15,000, which will allow places for about 18 percent of Hong Kong's secondary school graduates.

The total enrollment of the five government-funded institutions in Hong Kong for the 1990-91 academic year is 40,675. The breakdown is:

| | |
|----------------------------|--------|
| Hong Kong University | 8,150 |
| Chinese University of H.K. | 8,025 |
| Hong Kong Polytechnic | 13,500 |
| City Polytechnic of H.K. | 8,000 |
| Hong Kong Baptist College | 3,000 |

The projected enrollment for the system in 1994-95 is 58,270, or a growth of nearly 20,000 students. By 1997, education leaders in Hong Kong hope to have a total student enrollment, including expanded graduate programs, of 67,000 per year. This would accommodate about 25 percent of its secondary school leavers each year. (The U.S. rate is 40 percent, Japan's is 35 percent, the U.K.'s is only about 18 percent.)

Hong Kong's expansion program for tertiary education in the 1990s constitutes a massive new investment in human resources. The government is reported to have committed US\$210 million in capital investments and US\$350 million in new recurrent expenditures through the 1994-95 year to finance the expansion.

Implications of Expansion

There are many problems to surmount in such an expansion: maintaining academic standards, adequacy of new funding, impact on the secondary system, maintenance of English medium, curricula for new degree programs, developing a private sector role in tertiary education, building new facilities, upgrading teacher training colleges, etc. But no problem looms so large as the availability of faculty to teach in the burgeoning system.

John Clark, Director of the new Hong

Hong Kong continued

Kong Polytechnic, estimates that if Hong Kong tertiary institutions kept to an overall 1:11 student teacher ratio, they would need 2,500 new faculty within the next five years to keep up with the growth in student numbers. And this does not take into account staff lost to emigration and retirement.

The Secretary of Education and Manpower, Yeung Kai-yin, expects that Hong Kong will need 4,000 extra faculty in the next four years to staff the expansion. Some senior academics will be invited south from China. American-trained faculty from Taiwan will be prime recruitment targets. Britain has a surplus of academics, and Hong Kong graduates of American universities will be lured back.

In addition to expanding numbers, many institutions are seeking to upgrade their courses of study. The two polytechnics wish to offer degree courses to 80 percent of their students, and thus achieve university status. Baptist College also wants university status, and Lingnan College has been granted public funding in order to expand and upgrade its degree programs. The Open Learning Institute (OLI) of Hong Kong, which just opened in 1989, is developing new degree courses to meet the huge demand for continuing education in the territory.

The universities want to expand graduate studies in order to produce new teachers for the system. Hong Kong University is creating 1,000 new graduate places in the next four years. The major concern is retaining students in graduate programs when demand and remuneration for skilled labor will be high.

Research is a new emphasis, in part to support recruitment of high quality faculty from abroad. The government has begun a research fund with US\$15 million, and is forming a Research Grants Council. A new science park, drawing on models from Taiwan and Singapore, is under consideration. These are important steps in developing an integrated science and technology policy for Hong Kong.

One dramatic feature of tertiary expansion in the 1990s will be the new Hong

Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). Its first phase will open in the fall of 1991, three years ahead of schedule, to 600 students. HKUST is projected to grow to 7,000 students in five years, and to 10,000 students by 2,000. The facility is located on the east coast of the New Territories.

Within a British system of tertiary education, HKUST has many features of an American university. Dr. Woo Jia-wei, the former head of San Francisco State University, is its president. He has recruited over 20 deans and department heads, many from the U.S. and from American-trained Chinese academics from Taiwan. These 20 have recruited 1,000 faculty members for the October 1990 opening sessions.

The HKUST will have colleges of science, engineering, business and management, and general studies, including divisions of humanities and social sciences. Each will have graduate divisions and research departments. The medium of instruction will be English. With a strong emphasis on research and graduate programs, HKUST is championing the cause for Hong Kong's new emphasis on research and development in service of high technology industry for the 21st century.

Implications for International Education

Hong Kong has a strong tradition of study abroad. As a British colony, Hong Kong has for many years sent aspiring youth off to boarding schools and universities in the United Kingdom. The local secondary schools were well articulated with the U.K. tertiary system.

The tertiary sector in the territory has been small and elitist, forcing many good students to seek off-shore options to further their education. With strong ethnicities across the Pacific, many Hong Kong families have preferred to send their children to the U.S. or Canada. U.S. universities, for example, hosted about 10,000 or more Hong Kong students during most of the 1980s.

In 1980, the U.K. and Canada each received about 4,000 students from Hong Kong. The U.S. received 2,000 and Australia wasn't even on the map. Ten years later, Australia has gained dramatically. The "Big Four" are now within 500 students of each other.

Hong Kong has been the single largest supplier of foreign students to British universities and polytechnics. But the British government's meager offers of right of abode to Hong Kong people is changing that.

Hong Kong has about the same number of students in local higher edu-

cation as in overseas higher education. In the past there was so much demand for further education that local and off-shore options did not compete with each other. With the growth of indigenous capacity through the expansion plan, local and overseas institutions will have to compete to some extent with each other, especially for the best students.

Local higher education is cheaper, one stays close to family and home culture, and jobs are easier to get after graduation.

But the 1997 equation benefits study abroad because it enhances international mobility, and may even lead to a foreign passport. One reason for the popularity of Canada and Australia is the perception that university study there will offer stronger "immigration anchorage points" than the U.S., or certainly the U.K.

U.S. universities would do well to take many Hong Kong students in the 1990s in order to develop program linkages, faculty exchanges and collaborative research with Hong Kong institutions as they build up speed to leap over the 1997 line.

The system that will double itself in a decade will also create a new synthesis of Western and Chinese academic culture, and will become the engine of growth for higher education in south China and beyond. This education engine will, in turn, help to drive the economy of the whole region in the 21st century.

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