

Academic Profession, Entrepreneurial Universities and Scholarship of Application: The Imperative of Impact

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Introduction to the Special Issue

The system of higher education and the lifeworld of academic profession started to enter the “entrepreneurial turn” in the last decade of the twentieth century. Economic globalization and the emergence of knowledge economies intensify “the entrepreneurial state” (Mazzucato 2013) within universities, and the model of “entrepreneurial university” becomes a prototype for modern universities to evolve and adapt to the new reality of diminishing government revenues for higher education in some advanced post-industrial societies. As for most of the higher education systems, allocation of university resources is increasingly decided on competitive and “accountable” basis. The global trend of academic entrepreneurialism (for example Clark 1998; Tang 2014) profoundly affects the way in which higher education institutions and academic life are coordinated and organized. The form of scholarship is being re-engineered in such a way that the “scholarship of application” (SoA) becomes an imperative scholarly mission, alongside the “scholarship of discovery”. The rise of higher education reform coincided with the pervasive neoliberal transformation of the traditional academy in the 1990s. One social technology for promoting SoA is the policies of knowledge transfer, which have been institutionalized and formalized in the higher education sector, especially through the role played by the intermediary of knowledge transfer unit on campus (Geuna and Muscio 2009). In some cases, the academic profession is changing with a strong focus on research and acquiring external research grants, which demands knowledge and expertise derived from the SoA, especially when academics are looking for funds from government, public organizations, industry or business.

It is argued that the advocacy of the SoA dates back to the 1860s' America (Boyer 1996). For enhancing the alignment between university activities and the US national agricultural and industrial reforms, the Land Grant Act of 1862 was enacted and the federal government donated land to each state to establish “land-grant colleges”, which aimed at improving the lives of farmers and industrialists through the liberal and practical education. Subsequently, the idea of the “service mission” of American universities has been reflected by the leadership of university presidents. For example, Charles Eliot, the President of Harvard University from 1869 to 1909, considered the profession of American universities to live out the “democratic spirit of serviceableness”. American universities’ unrelenting commitment to service was advocated amidst the rise of academic returnees from Europe in the nineteenth century.

When the global world is entering the age of fourth industrial revolution, universities are expected to be an imperative component of any innovation system, applying basic research and innovative knowledge via the “triple-helix model” of university-industry-government interaction (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 1996). In the context of Europe, the renewed EU (European Union) Agenda for Higher Education focus on priorities that support the move to the SoA. It is suggested that universities must play their part in facing up to European Union’s scientific and democratic challenges, as there are too few PhD holders, in comparison to the United States and Japan, who develop a career outside academia. European academic professions need to promote SoA through greater focus in doctoral programs on the application of knowledge and interaction with future employers. Universities are not always contributing as

much as they are expected to innovation in the wider economy, hence there are innovation gaps to be filled now and then.

Towards the brand new era of academic entrepreneurialism, the quality and impact of research will be measured not only by conventional academic metrics, but also by the tangible benefits the academic profession bring to the global, regional, national and local communities. In view of the imperative of impact, university education should offer every student with opportunities for holistic personal development, enhanced language competence and experience outside their locality and comfort zone, through internships, work placements, other experiential learning at community organizations, charities and commercial firms.

This special issue, co-edited by Roger Chao, Jr. and me, seeks to examine the way academic entrepreneurialism manifests itself in the changing discourses of the notion of “scholarship”, its impact on the changing academic profession as well as on the world conditions beyond the academy. It particularly investigates the contexts, rationales, definitions and implications of the discursive field of the “scholarship of application”. It comprises four papers which research the changing connections between higher education, society and economy. The papers address development, analysis, and dissemination of theory-, policy-, and practice-related issues that are related to the theme of entrepreneurial university and academic profession and influence the social role and impact of higher education. The four papers contain single or various country cases or institutional cases supporting higher education practices in relation to academic entrepreneurialism and SoA. The special issue, as a whole, offers some informed analysis with a focus on regional, national and institutional policies related to the SoA.

In the first paper entitled “Entrepreneurial Universities in ASEAN nations: Insights from Policy Perspective”, Roger Chao, Jr. examines the regionalization process of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, paying special attention to the massification and privatization of higher education as well as the reconfiguration of ASEAN universities into entrepreneurial universities. He argues that the

notion of the entrepreneurial university denotes an important paradigmatic shift from its “ivory tower” model to an evolutionary mode that enables higher education institutions to survive and adapt in highly complex and risky environment in which they operate. The transformation processes, in the case of ASEAN, are significantly inter-related with SoA and academic capitalism. The paper suggests that universities in the ASEAN community amid their pursuit for SoA should focus on balancing their mission of scholarship of teaching and education, particularly in STEM and role of social sciences and humanities in such SoA endeavors.

Wai-wan Vivien Chan, the author of the second paper “Social Capital – A ‘Super Connector’ for Internationalization and Integration: The Role of Hong Kong Universities in the Development of the Greater Bay Area”, argues that in the latest China’s macro-economic project of constructing the “Greater Bay Area”, Hong Kong’s universities possess competitive advantage of playing the role of “super connector” in the integration of the regional innovation system. One advantage is the presence of international academic profession (Tang 2013) which is well connected with the world-class scientific and scholarly communities. Holding the indispensable assets of social capital and international academic professionals, Hong Kong’s universities will facilitate the higher education collaboration in the Greater Bay Area and propel the economic integration of Southern China. The discussions in the paper call for more comparative and international higher education studies about the pattern of internationalization and globalization in the Chinese context.

Beatrice Y.Y. Dang’s paper “Embracing Entrepreneurship: Impact of Knowledge Transfer Policies on Academic Profession in Hong Kong Higher Education” contributes to the literature which lacks empirical research about knowledge transfer and exchange in Asian academic profession (Tang 2017). The paper claims that although Hong Kong’s public universities are not affected by government funding reduction for higher education, research and knowledge transfer activities are the key strategic goals to enhance international competitiveness. It describes a new form of university governance which has emerged for fostering university-industry-community collaborations.

Knowledge transfer/ exchange activities have reshaped the trajectories of knowledge production and transmission, as well as the nature of academic life.

In “New Mission for New Time for Korean Higher Education”, Moon Jeong examines another East Asian case, South Korea, with reference to the changing policy discourse and practice and how they affect the transformation of educational paradigm. Facilitated by the ideological consensus between global and local policy networks, competency-based education becomes timely and relevant in response to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Higher education of South Korea has entered a new time and embraces the new mission, given the changing economic structure and demographic decline in youth cohorts.

Taken together, this special issue aims to initiate the intellectual dialogues with regards the increasingly important topics about academic profession, entrepreneurial universities, scholarship of application and the imperative of impact. Based on the current state of the literature, I recommend some general areas for future research: public mission of university and the new missions for knowledge transfer; the role of basic research in innovation system and academic entrepreneurship; impact of academic profession in the 21st century; public accountability, internationalization, and entrepreneurial universities; as well as critical review of university evolution amid globalizing academic entrepreneurialism and academic capitalism. It is hoped that conceptual discussions and empirical scholarship offered by this special issue can create new knowledge for better understanding the way in which the public mission of higher education is being reinvented in the new century of academic entrepreneurialism, and probably through the entrepreneurial state of university governance. In critical but practical terms, further research is needed to challenge the prototype of “entrepreneurial university”, for instance by presenting counter cases against higher

education practices in relation to academic entrepreneurialism and SoA. More democratic discourses can better inform the art of academic leadership and the formation of policies with decent cultural sensitivity.

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