Received: 25 September 2020 | Revised: 3 November 2020 | Accepted: 23 November 2020

DOI: 10.1111/hequ.12297

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Higher Education Quarterly WILEY

Navigating managerial and entrepreneurial reforms in research-intensive universities: A comparison of early career trajectories in Hong Kong and Canada

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Funding information
Wyng Foundation

Abstract

This article conveys the results of a reflexive investigation of the managerial practices and entrepreneurial discourses that shape the academic trajectories of early career scholars. Beginning with the experiences of early career scholars in research-intensive universities in Canada and Hong Kong, the authors explore some of the social and political-economic relations that are reshaping higher education systems across the world. Drawing on experiences navigating university governance, funding and performance management processes, the authors explore how participation in the marketised relations of higher education inserts people into competition with colleagues within and beyond a single university context, instrumentalises and constrains relationships with civil sector collaborators, and produces a shared sense that nothing one does is ever enough. In this way, the article illuminates some of the ways a new global knowledge economy conditions academic life.

摘要

本文探討學術管理主義和企業論述如何塑造新晉學者的學術軌跡， 並匯報相關反思性研究的結果。本文以任職加拿大和香港研究型大學的早期新晉學者為例，開始探討一些正在重塑全球高等教育體系的社會和政治經濟關係。作者利用新晉學者如何探索大學治理、資金和績效管理流程的經驗， 從而了解高等教育界的市場化關係如何將競爭意識植入在大學界的同事之間、令到與公

民社會的協作關係工具化、並產生一種感到工作慣常不達標的意識。通過上述的方法，本文闡明了新型全球知識經濟影響學術生活的一些方式。

1 | INTRODUCTION

This article traces the adoption of entrepreneurial frames and managerial workplace technologies that connect people working in universities to those in public and civil sector organisations with whom university professors are increasingly expected to work. It focuses on the turn towards 'engaged scholarship' in universities and the pressure to demonstrate that social science research contributes to measurable social and economic benefits. Engaged scholarship seeks to create tangible benefits outside of the academy: for example, by influencing social policy. This article connects institutionally-driven moves to enhance the impacts of social science scholarship (Levin, 2004; Nichols et al., 2013, 2015) to a larger swath of reforms—anchored in new assessment and accountability regimes—that have been steadily reshaping post-secondary education sectors globally, within the same timeframe (Lund, 2018; Lund & Tienari, 2019; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Stromquist, 2017; Wright & Shore, 2017). Specifically, the article illuminates how the turn towards competitive project-based funding coupled with the impetus to demonstrate high-impact results creates conditions for performance regulation and entrepreneurialism to flourish in post-secondary institutions. The study is anchored by an analysis of the university funding and performance management systems of two universities (one in Hong Kong and one in Canada); but these local examples point us towards funding and managerial reforms that are reshaping everyday work of professors in universities across the Canadian and Hong Kong higher education systems.

1.1 | Research problematic

The analysis put forward in this article reflects institutional ethnographic ways of working (Nichols, 2014, 2019; Smith, 2005). In institutional ethnography, a research problematic is found in the everyday world rather than through one's engagement with the research literature. The starting place for this joint inquiry emerged as we discussed differences and similarities in our experiences as not-yet-tenured academics and parents in Hong Kong (Hayes-Tang) and Canada (Nichols). Nichols and Hayes-Tang met through a scholar exchange programme, funded by a private donor in Hong Kong to enable lines of scholarly communication and collaboration between our two universities. Despite differences in the social, institutional and political-economic conditions of our lives, we were struck by a shared sense of urgency with respect to our shared status as 'early career scholars'[1] and spent many lunches comparing institutional expectations and the social organisation of other aspects of our lives (e.g., our family responsibilities), which constrained or enabled our efforts to meet these expectations and secure tenure.

Indeed, these conversations regularly centred on the tenure process itself, which, while not identical, was structured by similar performance metrics (e.g., international collaborations or Principal Investigator-PI status for national research council funded projects) that our senior colleagues regularly observed would have prevented *them* from successfully achieving tenure when they were on the tenure track. Analytically, a comparison of our experiences—from different geopolitical locations and differently reflective of the social relations of gender, race and language—affords us an opportunity to explore how translocal relations appear in and differently structure the specific local settings of our lives (Lund & Tienari, 2019). To this end, this article examines how the 'new reality' of tenure and promotion is structured via global discursive, economic and managerial relations, linking people's experiences in research-intensive 'world-class' universities on opposite sides of the globe.

1.2 | Aims and objectives

This article conveys the results of a reflexive investigation of the managerial practices and entrepreneurial mindsets that connect our work in universities on opposite sides of the globe (i.e., in Canada and Hong Kong) as well as our work in our respective local settings with the civil sector and educational organisations with whom we collaborate. Our aim was to produce an empirical account for our shared experiences and observations—particularly the shared sense that we are continually falling behind. In this way, our work engages with recent theorisations about the coercive effects of clock time in the academy (Saul & Burkholder, 2020) and the dynamics of time, space and researcher subjectivity (Torres-Olave & Lee, 2020). It also points to some of the embodied work of 'creativity, inventiveness, courage, political astuteness and reflexivity'—rather than passive compliance—among early career researchers seeking to do socially relevant or engaged scholarship in market-driven, neoliberal institutional environments (Bristow et al., 2017, p. 1187).

The article is structured as follows: first, we review the literature on performance regulation, higher education and the knowledge economy; second, we describe our sociological approach (institutional ethnography), illuminating how we brought our research problematic into view by comparing our experiences on the job market and navigating our institutions' governance, funding and performance management processes. Finally, we mobilise our experiential knowledge of entrepreneurial higher education reforms from our distinct vantage points in two research-intensive institutions, illuminating how our participation in the increasingly marketised environment of higher education inserts us into competitive relations with colleagues within and beyond our own university contexts, instrumentalises and constrains our relations with civil sector collaborators who are similarly juggling project-based funding, and produces a shared sense that nothing we do is ever enough.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW: PERFORMANCE REGULATION, HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

The last 70 years have seen exponential expansion in universities and student enrolment rates, spurred more recently by increasing global competition for primacy in a knowledge economy where universities and colleges are positioned as key drivers of a nation's social and economic well-being (Frank & Meyer, 2007). Alongside the growth in post-secondary education, many OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries have experienced changes to the delivery and administration of human services, with many social welfare functions taken up by publicly-funded service organisations rather than the state itself (Griffith & Smith, 2014). The move to embrace decentralised service delivery required new modes of managing and accounting for public funds. The New Public Management (NPM) emerged as a key technology for generating particular governing outcomes without direct state intervention. It refers to the range of technical and discursive changes taking place over the last twenty years in public, civil sector and governing institutions, including universities (Edler et al., 2014), but also in the government and non-governmental organisations with which engaged scholars collaborate. The NPM is associated with moves to embrace a range of calculative technologies (Miller & Rose, 2008)—indicators, metrics, rankings, statistical and accounting procedures—for transforming the minutiae of everyday life into measurable, comparable and monitorable phenomena.

In academic contexts, the widespread implementation of these technologies reflects global academic competition between universities seeking recognition as world-class institutions (Lund, 2020; Salmi, 2009; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Wright & Greenwood, 2017). While discursive and technical specificities are evident in particular local settings, there is a common thrust to the reforms insofar as they are based on the idea of improving return on investments in higher education by (a) diminishing public investments and increasing dependence on entrepreneurial activities (e.g., university advancement); (b) the implementation of targeted measurement, accounting and auditing practices; and (c) the use of rankings within and across institutions and nations (Shore & Wright, 2015;

Stromquist, 2017; Wright & Greenwood, 2017). The result has been to increase tuition costs and institutional dependence on donors, corporate partners, government contracts and patents (Wright & Greenwood, 2017). Shared standards for research excellence and the use of economic and other common units of measurement (e.g., impact indices; the tenure 'clock') become necessary technologies for enabling the commensurability across unlike contexts, which the marketisation of higher education demands.

With respect to universities across OECD countries and Europe, Roumbanis (2018) and Wright (2014) observe shifts in university management and organisation which privilege managerial modes of governance, entrepreneurship and competition. The use of performance evaluation and audit processes to improve efficiency, an increasing focus on demonstrating the economic and social impacts of research, and national and international competition for 'prestige, resources and staff' (Edler et al., 80) have reshaped the everyday functioning of post-secondary institutions. These changes have been driven by government, university administration, and by academics themselves as they respond and adapt to conditions of university expansion, increasing competition and labour market precarity. Under decentralised funding models and in the context of diminishing government funding, university leadership decisions are fundamentally shaped by the resources at their disposal, which are in turn often shaped by regulatory frameworks associated with federal research granting initiatives.

The concept of the entrepreneurial university is used to account for changes to university culture and governance resulting from these shifts in higher education systems across the globe, beginning towards the end of 1980s and continuing throughout the 1990s. The disinvestment in public sector entities coupled with managerial reforms described under the banner of NPM (Clarke & Newman, 1997) created conditions for the entrepreneurial—innovative, marketised and competitive structures and practices—to flourish within and between universities. Universities that positioned themselves to more actively participate in the instrumentalist and revenue-generating exchange relations of a burgeoning knowledge economy—that is, those where faculty and administration adopted an increasingly entrepreneurial posture (Rhoades & Stensaker, 2017)—were seen as more capable of navigating these reforms. Entrepreneurialism in higher education was thus encouraged.

An entrepreneurial orientation is pursued through organisational, economic and cultural shifts evidenced in the university's governance structure (e.g., senior faculty and managerial professionals hired to nourish links with industry and other markets), a diversification of funding, and new human resource policies (e.g., internal competition; contract positions). For organisational leaders in post-secondary institutions, the availability of resources heavily influences the 'ability to steer, as large shares of institutional funding or large endowments can be used for setting internal incentives, while, on the other hand, a transition to project based funding shifts the logical or resources acquisition to the level of research units and individuals' (Edler et al., 2014, p. 80). This latter move, which shifts responsibility for resource acquisition to departments and individuals within departments, is associated with accounting and ranking practices that operate at the level of individual students, professors and departments in universities. Similar practices are evident in the everyday work of the students, teachers, schools, youth workers, community agencies and social service departments with whom university professors in faculties of education (like us) might collaborate. As governments, agencies and individuals are drawn into competitive and entrepreneurial relations, our work is increasingly situated on the borders of moral and financial modes of reasoning (Shore & Wright, 2015), whereby time spent generating funds and then measuring and communicating one's impacts encroaches on the mission-driven (or political) work one might want to be pursuing as a socially engaged researcher.

3 | RESEARCH APPROACH

This article is inspired by institutional ethnographic modes of research (Smith, 1999, 2005). We take up Smith's invitation for research inquiry to begin in the embodied realities of everyday life rather than an abstracted theoretical proposition or discursively constructed sociological category. As such, in this article we draw heavily on our own experiences as a starting place for inquiry, moving into investigations of the political-economic relations that were shaping our work as pre-tenure faculty in research-intensive universities (Lund, 2012, 2020; Lund & Tienari, 2019; Wright & Shore, 2017). Pragmatically, this orientation involves paying attention to people's talk and activities (including one's own talk and actions) as textually mediated modes of being and relating, which constitute social relations (Smith, 2005).

From distinct experiential vantage points, we have each produced an analytic account of the ways that particular institutional and policy relations at our respective institutions are visible in and structure the materiality of our lives. We write these accounts from a first-person perspective (Nichols at McGill University in Canada and Hayes-Tang at The Education University of Hong Kong) as is common for institutional ethnographic studies. The accounts read something like case studies (Baxter & Jack, 2008), although this research terminology is at odds with how an institutional ethnographer typically works and thinks. Rather than offering a range of cases through which to build and test theory (Burawoy, 1998), our methodological aims align more with auto-ethnographic ways of working (Adams et al., 2015; Maynes et al., 2008) and the comparative exploration of embodied researcher subjectivities undertaken by Torres-Olave and Lee (2020). The objects of our study are the managerial relations that link our work together, connect us in ever more prescribed ways to our civil sector collaborators, and hook us indirectly into market relations through which our work as engaged scholars acquires an exchange value in the global knowledge economy. But the origins of our investigation are the dynamic and embodied realities of our divergent and multidimensional lives (Torres-Olave & Lee, 2020). We pay attention to the ways institutional relations condition intersubjective felt or embodied responses among people participating in reflexively organised modes of relating within particular institutional environments (Creed et al., 2020).

A key feature of an institutional ethnographic analysis is the empirical drive to show how experiences in one setting are connected to (although clearly not the same as) experiences others are having elsewhere. In what follows, we seek to connect the dots between the reorganisation of post-secondary education in Canada and Hong Kong. We trace the ways that evolving organisational practices in universities show up in other sites where professors are working and engage people across sectors in modes of calculation and thought that hook their discreet activities into relations of measurement and accounting through which global capitalism operates on our lives. Our intent is to show how our participation in post-secondary audit practices suture our daily work into the relations of competition and exchange which comprise the knowledge economy.

4 | FINDINGS

To produce the accounts that follow, we sought out publicly available documents and spoke with people who work in other university departments (e.g., accounting) in order to bring into view the textually mediated institutional processes that subtly shape our everyday work and experiences as pre-tenure professors. We have organised this section to illuminate common institutional dimensions that are present across the national contexts of our investigation, while also highlighting differences in how these institutional processes play out.

4.1 | The everyday work of counting, tracking and ranking and the institutional organisation of 'research excellence'

4.1.1 | Hayes-Tang: The Education University of Hong Kong

Before I began my three-year tenure-track contract at The Education University in Hong Kong, my department head arranged a meeting with me and informed me of the baseline targets I was expected to reach in terms of job performance. While less formal, this meeting served much the same purpose as the letter of employment which

Nichols received. I have been made keenly aware that to secure tenure I need to ensure my work contributes to the university's top-15 status in international rankings, thus advancing the institution's drive for 'world-class excellence'. Research productivity is to be demonstrated via the production of single-authored articles (or equivalent—there is a formula to calculate equivalencies) in a journal of rank B or above according to the University Journal Ranking List. Known as 'The List', the document is updated every two years and makes reference to the established journal 'quality' indicators, including Journal Impact Factor and a SCImago Journal Rank.[2] Each researcher receives a performance-driven reward for publishing in a rank B (or higher) journal. The money can be used for hiring research assistants, pursuing books or equipment, or covering conference expenses. Like at Nichols' institution, a significant portion of the yearly budget of the department is also allocated from the centralised account according to the collective research productivity of the department. The aggregated number of publications and successful grant applications are the key performance indicators of departments and schools/faculties.

In addition to scholarly publication, the impacts of our academic work on society and economy are also considered when appraising the performance of an academic unit. Following the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) employed in universities across the United Kingdom, academic departments in Hong Kong are required to submit 'case studies' which showcase knowledge transfer, social impacts and engaged scholarship. Most case studies highlight the work of senior academics. Junior academics like myself who have comparatively less-developed networks and partnerships are expected to develop their competitive edge in research and grant applications. Looking back on my academic career to date, it is evident that the same set of reforms—albeit early in their implementation and which prompted me to abandon an unfunded PhD in sociology for a funded PhD in education (as a consequence of its greater perceived social and economic relevance)—shape my experiences with the research performance and quality assurance assessment exercises today. In order to write this paper, I traced the history of the reforms to better understand the structural shifts that have influenced my academic trajectory from graduate studies to my current appointment.

Mirroring the prototype of the University Grants Committee (UGC) in Britain, Hong Kong's UGC was established in 1965 to advise the government on the developments of higher education and allocate funding to the institutions it oversees. Mediating between the government and public universities to reduce the government's direct interference in university affairs, it grants its institutions legal status as self-governing statutory bodies. However, the institutional autonomy of Hong Kong's public universities has been reduced since the 1990s (Law, 2019), as a consequence of this restructuring. The UGC employs performance-based funding (PBF) to implement its strategic policy directions towards internationalisation, the pursuit of world-class excellence and collaboration with the People's Republic of China. Since 1993, UGC has adopted zero-based budgeting which links universities' overall performance with their recurrent funding. The UGC also delegates regular supervision over UGC-funded institutions to two non-statutory bodies (and ad hoc task forces) under its aegis: the Research Grants Council and the Quality Assurance Council which were founded in 1991 and 2007, respectively. Serving as the sole monitor and auditor of the performance of its institutions, UGC practises and fosters the principles of NPM, embracing the pursuit of excellence, international competition, quality assurance, accountability, fitness of purpose and value for money (Law, 2019).

4.1.2 | Nichols: McGill University, Canada

When I finished my PhD, I joined what is colloquially described as 'the academic gig economy' in Canada. That is, I became one of the many people assembling a full-time employment experience through a number of part-time and non-unionised contract positions—largely in universities and hospitals (public sector workplaces historically characterised by full-time unionised positions). I simultaneously stepped into the fray of an increasingly competitive academic job market. This four-year period of contract employment led to shifts in how I understand and relate to my work that remain with me today. I worked countless hours every week, afraid to turn down a contract.

I obsessively tracked every minute spent on each of the projects that together comprised my full-time schedule, and I became a bread-and-butter contractual researcher: one who sees the production of research outputs or deliverables (rather than the pursuit of knowledge) as the central objective of my work. I became practised in repackaging my work and ideas to fit with the various institutional and funding contexts within which I was participating. These learned dispositions served me well when I became a tenure-track faculty member in a research-intensive university in 2015.

When I arrived at McGill University, I received a letter outlining the conditions of my employment, including the articulation of annual target academic outputs across the various domains of my work, but especially in terms of research outputs. This letter is contractual: it outlines the key benchmark targets through which my performance will be judged, and it works with other managerial accounting regimes at the university. Each year, my colleagues and I are required to submit an annual report of our productivities (i.e., the number of students supervised and graduated; number of publications; number of conference talks, keynote addresses and guest lectures). The transposition of our diverse working lives into numbers allows our department chairs to make defendable decisions with respect to the ranking each of us will receive. The category of our ranking determines our annual pay increases (if any) and two consecutive years of a category 5 ranking will lead to a targeted performance review for failing to demonstrate merit in any category (that is, for simply upholding your expected duties).[3] The obsessive tracking habit which developed as a way for me to account for my hours spent on a range of different projects as an independent researcher now serves the preparation of each year's merit report and ultimately my reappointment and tenure dossiers. The accounting procedures used to demonstrate and compare research productivity in my faculty require that I translate my work into standardised metrics meant to convey my productivity, relevance and impacts.

Increasingly, this accounting and tracking work resembles the accounting and reporting practices of my collaborators in community organisations and public institutions—each of us working to warrant continued investments in our work by demonstrating unremitting improvements in productivity. Many of the people with whom I work in community-based non-profit organisations experience this pressure in funders' interests in continuous innovation and demonstrated impacts (including, but not limited to, a growing demand for their services). On the tenure track, the pressure is linked to the institution's expectation that we demonstrate an upward trend in productivity. In either case, the unrelenting performative pressure is experienced as emotional and physical burnout (Malenfant et al., 2019). To maintain my own upward arc of productivity over the last four years, I simply worked longer and longer hours. Constrained as I was by familial responsibilities, to maintain this arc increasingly required that I began work before I got my children up to get ready for school, continued after I'd put my children to bed, and carved out time to work on every holiday. Collectively, these experiences led me to experience profound existential and physical exhaustion—a state of being that I came to see as normal and unavoidable. In subsequent subsections, I explore some of the economic and discursive shifts behind my experiences of isolation, urgency and exhaustion, linking these to a broader swath of managerial and neoliberal reforms that have reshaped the landscape of civil society in Canada and which normalise precarious work and burnout as the trade-off for passionate engagement in one's work (Lund & Tierani, 2019).

4.2 | Performance-based funding and research impact

4.2.1 | Hayes-Tang: The Education University of Hong Kong

The quest for international competitiveness and excellence materialised after the late 1990s when the UGC began to pursue quality and efficiency in the post-massification of higher education admission (UGC, 1999). A regulatory regime for higher education which institutionalised NPM values and mechanisms was set up through increasing internal (empowering university councils with enlarging the number of external members) and external control (regular reviews and audits of different higher education missions). The UGC regulates university autonomy by adapting and merging market and managerial processes and values. Indeed, in Hong Kong—as elsewhere—these reforms are discursively framed as creating positive shifts in university performance and aiding the nation state in its pursuit of world-class excellence. Five Hong Kong universities are ranked among the top 100 universities internationally in the Quacquarelli Symonds University Rankings, and three in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings in 2017 (both ranking agencies are based in the UK). Their performance is comparable to other academic hubs in the West (e.g., Boston, USA and London, UK) where a similar number of 'top-100 universities' are located. Indeed, the improved international rankings reinforce their position that top-down oversight and an entrepreneurial organisational shift drives improved performance.

During my research, I discovered that the assessment and regulatory practices which have shaped my pre-tenure experiences are inspired by two important review reports on institutional governance in Hong Kong higher education, namely the Sutherland Report in 2002 and the Newby Report in 2015. In these reports, timely and globally relevant concepts and practices of university governance are transplanted and adopted from the prestigious universities in the West to Hong Kong. For example, all public higher education institutions reviewed and altered their management and governance structures in response to the Sutherland Report. The report also recommended universities establish a written accountability framework that articulates the relationship between the government and university, sets key performance indicators to be used by the university council for assessing their progress in achieving institutional priorities, and formulates a register for coping with institutional risks (including financial and reputational risks). A task force was set up to monitor how public universities responded to the report's recommendation. It is expected that all publicly-funded universities in Hong Kong will conform to the direction of the UGC and consolidate managerialism. In this regard, the reports serve as key tools which legitimise the regulatory functions of the UGC with respect to individual university assessments and quality assurance processes, and hooks my work into national accounting and regulatory procedures.

4.2.2 | Nichols: McGill University, Canada

In Canadian post-secondary institutions, the adoption of managerial reforms has been subtler and less transparent, influenced significantly by changes to the ways universities are funded. Education law is provincially mandated (*Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, s 93 p VI, Distribution of Legislative Powers). Universities operate through a combination of provincial funding in the form of government grants and student tuition fees. In the 1960s and 1970s, government covered 90 per cent of the cost of operating a university. Since the 1980s, the proportion of costs covered by government has been steadily declining. As of 2015–2016, government grants accounted for less than 52.5 per cent of university operating costs (Usher, 2018). Simultaneously, the costs of operating universities continue to rise. The result is an increase in student tuition and the emergence of growing numbers of deregulated professional programmes and international student fees, increasing university class sizes and supervisory loads,[4] growing dependence on part-time and sessional instructors, and the impetus to diversify university budgets (Canadian Federation of Students, 2015). Although universities continue to rely heavily on provincial funding in the form of government grants and student tuition fees, federal funding in the form of performance-driven support for research,[5] as well as transfer payments from the federal government to the provinces, they increasingly rely on contracts, partnerships and grants from industry (Usher, 2018). Entrepreneurial and managerial modes of thought and activity exert a normative influence via the pursuit and management of university–industry partnerships.

This confluence of economic relations also sets the stage for new managerial accounting initiatives within universities. Canadian universities receive three envelopes of funding annually: (a) Teaching Grants; (b) Support Grants; and (c) Infrastructure Grants. Once received, the funding at my university is redistributed based on weighted full-time equivalent (FTE) calculations at the programme level—that is, it is enrolment-driven. Programme-based weighted FTE calculations allow central accounting to adjust how much of the provincial grant each department receives as a function of the costs of administering its teaching programmes. Faculties also receive a temporary budget allocation. This budget is based on a 3-year rolling average, calculated based on how many students we teach each year across our faculty's programmes whether they are officially enrolled as students in our faculty or not. Enrolment-driven budget allocations and decentralised departmental budgets incentivise larger class sizes and supervisory caps as well as other cost-saving and revenue-generating measures.

Indeed, departmental operating budgets increasingly rely on funds generated through indirect costs associated with faculty research activities, as well as endowments and donations. This first stream of funds associated with research funding connects my activities in the university to my collaborators in community non-profit and public sector settings, whose work pivots around programme-based funding. Universities receive indirect research support fund amounts corresponding to faculty success rates in federal and provincial research funding processes. The more competitive faculty researchers are in the Canadian research grants process, the more money the university receives in federal cash transfers (i.e., indirect research support funds) and allocations of federally-funded Canada Research Chairs. Within the university, the number and value of the grants received at the faculty level is deployed to determine the allotment of the federal research support funds each faculty will receive. The imperative that individual tenure-track faculty members in my faculty generate and sustain federal research funding as an indication of merit and requirement for tenure arises at the intersection of these managerial accounting relations.

Additionally, in this context of rising costs and shrinking public expenditure, there has been considerable investment in university advancement, communications and marketing, as Canadian universities spend more time and energy in branding and fund-generation. Industry contracts, for example, allow the university to add a 40-percent indirect cost line to any budget in order to cover the cost of administering these contracts once secured. Faculty budgets are also influenced by donations from alumni and increasingly from private and charitable sector foundations. These economic and managerial shifts reorganise the work of administrators and faculty. For example, the role of the dean has evolved to focus much more explicitly on fund-generation and the diversification of revenue streams to offset funding shortfalls and maintain stable operations. Faculties and departments are encouraged to be more entrepreneurial, such that they are able to manage budget shortfalls and offset the instability produced by the enrolment-driven budget allocations. These budgetary and managerial changes also result in shifts to professors' work.

For example, similar to Hayes-Tang's own experiences as a student in Hong Kong, McGill University does not offer a standard base funding package to graduate students. Graduate funding for students varies year to year as a consequence of regular changes in departmental budgets which are shaped by enrolment-driven funding formulas. In our department, rather than offering a standard funding package (e.g., in the form of teaching or research assistantship positions), we offer a number of competitive awards. Individual faculty and students are ultimately responsible for maintaining funding through faculty participation in competitive research grant cycles and student participation in competitive scholarship and fellowship processes, respectively. Increasingly, the work of applying for and managing a steady stream of research funds for distinct projects is *the* central work of individual university faculty members and their students in research-intensive institutions.

4.3 | Connecting the dots: Universities, civil sector organisations and the pursuit of social impacts

4.3.1 | Hayes-Tang: The Education University of Hong Kong

Management of research performance and productivity is central to the regulatory regime of Hong Kong higher education and its goal of achieving world-class status in research. The academic appointment, tenure and promotion processes are where these managerial reforms materialise. Apart from initiating competition for research funding between universities, the Hong Kong education system borrowed the mechanism of the UK's RAEs to review the performance and quality of its institutions. The exercise induces improvements in research, and more importantly informs research funding for the upcoming recurrent block grant.

Participating in these exercises, which individual faculty must do each year, takes time, as we must produce our teaching performance quality audits and management accountability reviews, which are in turn audited by the deans and subsequently rolled into the university's performance reports. For example, my work life and productivity are closely monitored and assessed through self-reporting mechanisms, which are reviewed and endorsed by institutional leaders (department heads, faculty deans, vice presidents/provosts or higher-level committees). Just like Nichols, my university's appraisal system (on research, teaching and service) is linked with the salary adjustment on a yearly basis. Application for research and conference grants requires demonstration of prior research output and commitment to future productivity. Predicting and demonstrating the impacts of research has also become a new and essential part of the research grant process for the key government's research funding starting from 2019–2020. In the template of the grant proposal, the new section 'pathways to impact' was added right after the summary of the proposal upfront in the document. This change of documentary template directs the change of research design which needs to be aligned with social impacts and engaged scholarship.

In the years around 2017–2019, preparation for the RAE 2020 became the talk of the day among my colleagues, as we were asked to organise and participate in a mock assessment process, whereby we each submit our three best publications for assessment. Seminars and professional development workshops at departmental and faculty levels were arranged to ensure we were familiar with the benchmarking process, and experts from the UK were invited to share their previous experiences with the Research Excellence Framework (which the Hong Kong's RAE is shadowing). Experienced academics, especially from the Anglo-American systems, with successful track records of grant application and professional experience of research/grant assessment are often contracted by my university to contribute to faculty development. All of the work to prepare for the assessment exercise is in addition to the actual work, which will be assessed. The experience of continuous performance appraisal shows up in my own and my colleague's continuous availability to university demands—an availability that becomes visible in (for example) our timely responses to electronic mail, even during evenings and weekends.

4.3.2 | Nichols: McGill University, Canada

Of interest to us in this article are the ways that our work in universities increasingly echoes the work of people in civil sector organisations (with whom we partner as a demonstration of our commitment to research impact). Operational budget shortfalls in civil sector organisations are frequently produced by per-unit government cash transfers that do not cover the costs of delivering the service they've been contracted to deliver. The remainder of the costs of running the organisation are pursued in the form of cash and in-kind donations, sponsorships and programme-based grants. Much like in universities, we have seen a rise in the numbers of full-time communications staff, full-time fundraisers and unpaid or government-subsidised interns in community organisations with whom we have worked over the last decade. These positions are key to the generation and maintenance of the funds required to carry out one's key mission work (e.g., increasing intellectual equality or ending homelessness). Where organisations do not receive any stable core funding through direct or indirect government investment, programme-based grant-seeking and donations remain the central modes of fund-generation, trapping civil and community sector organisations in grant-writing and reporting cycles that resemble those shaping the work lives of university faculty. Historically, the stakes were much lower for university professors insofar as they would maintain their employment even if they couldn't maintain funding for their research. But this is changing.

Today, national RAEs and internal ranking processes—alongside the benchmarks associated with the tenure and promotion process and contractual obligations laid out in letters of offer—set the stage for ongoing assessment of a professor's ability to meet performance criteria, including the generation of federal research funds as a principal investigator. A part of effective participation in these cyclical grant-seeking and reporting processes is an imperative to demonstrate that the work is creating measurable social impacts. As a rationality and associated set of practices, the return-on-investment approach which has characterised civil sector funding regimes for the last two decades, and which burdens community organisations with the work of monitoring, measuring and communicating the effects of their work as a justification for continued investment, is reshaping university research, tenure and promotion.

5 | DISCUSSION

This article traces the experiences of two early career academics into the NPM reforms enabling the adoption of an ever more entrepreneurial posture in universities on opposite sides of the globe. In doing so, we highlight similarities in our experiences, such as an inability to ever stop working, that share origins in economic, institutional and discursive shifts implicated in widespread changes to higher education systems globally. For example, in Hong Kong, a key discourse shaping the orientation of work in families and workplaces is the idea that the nation is falling behind, as the 2002 Sutherland Report implied. Although this discourse appears to be specific to Hong Kong's national narratives and historical participation in global markets, how this message is embodied and perpetuated (as a continuous low-grade state of anxiety, guilt and fear when one is away from one's work) is present in other contexts, including the aforementioned academic 'gig economy' in Canada. The discursive frames Nichols sees organising public life in Canada and which Hayes-Tang observes being wielded in Hong Kong are conversant with global austerity discourses, the subsequent rationalisation of reduced investment in public and civil sector organisations, and the adoption of an entrepreneurial posture in higher education, in civil society and more broadly in public life. Discourse and ideology, as we conceive of these things in institutional ethnography and as we have sought to show in this article, are the actual practices of people working to translate social life into the systems of classification and intellectual organisation, which underpin and organise policy and other institutional processes across time and space (Smith, 2004).

As much as global higher education reforms (i.e., economic, institutional and discursive shifts) condition our lives in similar ways, we retain our agency as individuals and experience the reforms differently as a result of our social positioning. Further, as the accounts above reveal, the higher education reforms are not unilaterally engaged across national contexts. Rather, the move to become 'globally competitive and locally engaged' (Etzkowiitch et al., 2008 in Stensaker & Benner, 2013) plays out differently in different local contexts, shaped by the history and reputation of individual universities and higher education systems (e.g., the stronger regulatory role played by the UGC in Hong Kong).

There have also been considerable differences in our experiences, shaped by and reproducing the social relations of gender, race, class and language. Nichols is a woman and a mother who takes on much of the care-giving work with her children and domestic work in the home. She also does participatory research with young people, trying to survive under conditions of acute poverty and institutional surveillance—meaning that she also undertakes considerable care-giving work outside the home as well. Hayes-Tang is a man and has a wife who is not employed outside the home; as such, he is not expected to be a primary care-giver for the children nor undertake domestic tasks. Furthermore, different labour practices in Hong Kong and Canada mean that Hayes-Tang and his wife have full-time domestic help—something that would not be possible on a professor's salary in Canada. On the other hand, Nichols is a white woman, whose first language is English—the language of scholarly communication in many prestigious international journals—and she completed all of her graduate work in Western institutions, not unlike those being endorsed by the Sutherland and Newby reports in Hong Kong. International scholarly communication practices thus privilege Nichols' linguistic heritage and the cultural norms of her academic training. Finally, although Nichols' research is characterised by heightened relational demands, it is also seen by granting bodies as addressing an objective social need—thereby increasing its viability for funding under social return-on-investment economic paradigms and allowing her to pursue early tenure.

Our intent in this piece is not to flatten these differences. By beginning with our unique and shared experiences, our aim has been to discover how a range of changing economic, audit and policy relations within and beyond higher education have contoured our academic trajectories and our collaborations with non-academic organisations.

6 | CONCLUSION

Since the 1990s, the OECD, the World Economic Forum and the World Bank have championed the idea of a global knowledge economy, wherein universities would play a key role in the relative competitive success of a nation state (Wright, 2014). The OECD, in particular, was pivotal in the development of policy frameworks that shifted universities from discipline-specific research to research that prioritised social and economic benefits (Wright & Shore, 2017). At the same time that universities were being reorganised to enable productive market relations with industry and the public sector, the activities of civil society organisations were being reorganised to compete for government contracts and grants, including those offered by charitable foundations associated with private multinational corporations (e.g., the Bombardier or Home Depot foundations) (Clarke & Newman, 1997; Nichols, 2014).

As we have shown, these shifts in funding practices and relations between public post-secondary institutions, civil society and industry have shaped an entrepreneurial and managerial turn in sectors that were historically defined in opposition to the market. In both post-secondary and civil sector contexts, funding practices shape the work that people do, as well as how this work is discussed, evaluated and understood. As universities have come to occupy key positions in a global knowledge economy (Stensaker & Benner, 2013), the work of university faculty and their collaborators is being hooked into global accountability regimes and relations of capital and exchange in new ways. Important to the analysis we offer are the ways that individual performance monitoring and assessment practices are adjusted to enable university-level demonstrations of performance and productivity in international ranking and performance-based funding formulas. Universities engage in these practices while maintaining their discursive connections to the tenure process so that the increasing standards for labour market positions and promotions are seen as natural outcomes of a neutrally competitive process.

Furthermore, in a ‘zero-sum game’, where people are competing for a finite amount of grant money, number of jobs or followers, expectations for an individual’s competitive success continue to rise (Wright, 2014). The pressure to do more with less is at the heart of the joint inquiry this article conveys. Our aim has been to connect the dots between global higher education reforms, the discourses and ideologies through which they are legitimated and sustained, and the materiality of our experiences as new professors on opposite sides of the world. We illuminate how our participation in institutions of post-secondary education during a period of dramatic change to university funding and governance practices have shaped our academic trajectories, our current collaborations and scholarly activities, and other aspects of our personal lives outside of work (e.g., if and when we take a holiday).

FUNDING INFORMATION

The WYNG Foundation sponsored a Scholars Exchange between Hong Kong Education University and McGill. This paper is an outcome of the exchange.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Author elects to not share data.

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ENDNOTES

[1] As a research population, early career researchers are generally understood to be students, postdoctoral fellows and other post-PhD researchers who are within five years of completing their doctoral studies (Browning et al., 2017; McAlpine et al., 2018). With respect to earmarked federal research funding in Canada, an early career researcher is anyone who is within five years of their first independent academic position. We fall into the latter category.

[2] Similar to the five assessment categories of research output grading associated with the Research Assessment Exercise by the Research Grants Council, journals are ranked as A* (top 5%), A (next 15%), B (next 30%) and C (next 50%).

[3] The mandatory performance reviews are not university policy; rather, this process was initiated by faculty-level administration and communicated orally to new faculty participating in a mentorship programme.

[4] For example, the ratio of students to full-time faculty members increased by almost 40 per cent between 1990 and 2006.

[5] Performance-driven funding comes to universities through tri-council research funding to individual researchers/teams and associated indirect cost transfers to universities and through competitive institutional support programmes, such as the Canadian Innovation Fund or Canada Research Chairs programme.

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How to cite this article: Nichols N, Hayes Tang H-H. Navigating managerial and entrepreneurial reforms in research-intensive universities: A comparison of early career trajectories in Hong Kong and Canada. *Higher Educ Q*. 2022;76:116–130. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12297