



Comparative Education Research Centre
ESTABLISHED IN 1994

 Faculty of Education
The University of Hong Kong



Higher Education and Intellectual Leadership: Amplifying Critical Inquiry



Anatoly V. Oleksiyenko

Director of Comparative Education Research Center (CERC), Associate Professor, Higher Education in the Academic Unit of Social Contexts and Policies of Education (SCAPE), Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam Road, Hong Kong SAR.



Over the past decade, I have encouraged more in-depth discussion of the forces generating asymmetries, anxieties and rancour in global knowledge production (Oleksiyenko and Sa 2010; Oleksiyenko 2014; Oleksiyenko, Zha, Chirikov and Li 2018). Drawing on Macfarlane's (2013) seminal work on intellectual leadership, Nian Ruan and I recently explored the literature on knowledge production, academic citizenship, boundary transgression, and public intellectualism, and

wrote that interdependencies among these forces were important, but poorly understood in global higher education (Oleksieynko and Ruan 2019). The research deepened our concern about academics' research agendas being steered by neoliberalism toward greater competitiveness, performativity, unfreedoms, and anxieties that intensify human vulnerability in the academe (Oleksiyenko and Tierney 2018). As I have argued, unhealthy competition spearheads disunity and resentment in global academia (Oleksiyenko 2018). Nonetheless, it seems that democracy, freedoms and other socially-significant issues are moving further away from the center to the periphery of discourse in higher education (Oleksiyenko and Jackson 2020). While cross-cultural perspectives on leadership gain more visibility, it appears that the diversity of views confound, rather than intensify the exchange of ideas, critique, and inquiry. The result has been the emergence of niches demarcated by participants' origins and allegiances. The assumptions and messages of self-serving truths within these niches proliferated while some scholars still nurtured a belief that this had been creating a better globalised and accessible science and education. Meanwhile, the appeals of intellectual leadership scholars for greater synergy of knowledge production, boundary transgression and communal or public activism across niches, rather than within them, have not had much success. One can argue that "academic tribes and territories" (Becher and Trowler 2001) have made significant progress in creating echo-chambers instead.

Intellectuals are shaped by their inimitable educational and social communities and contexts, which have different perspectives on the need for synergies and boundary-crossing. In global higher education, intellectual communities are diverse in their epistemological and organizational designs (Uslu and Welch 2018). Styles of knowledge production and dissemination often stem from scholars' long-standing interests and commitments to agendas that are controlled by influential scholars in their field, who advocate for, or critique certain theories and methods (Macfarlane 2011). Peer-review processes

often prioritise themes and perspectives that suit a narrow body of disciplinary conventions and their formidable creators (Souder 2011). While some powerful stakeholders may interfere financially and politically in the hope that they can re-orient the scientific discourse for their own profit, sustainable impacts in global science are often the result of superior intellectual work based on academic freedom, critical inquiry and innovative disruption, rather than resource allegiances alone (Christensen and Eyring 2011; Macfarlane, Zhang and Pun 2014). Impactful research is internationally peer-reviewed, applied, shared, criticized, and disassembled – with only selected fragments remaining to undergo a new round of revisions, critique and deconstruction – and thus unceasingly. What makes the bricks in the intellectual constructs (or walls) more or less load-bearing is often shrouded in mystery (Oleksiyenko 2015). Shouldering them uncritically can be hazardous (Oleksiyenko 2014).

This challenge intensifies in conditions of local, regional, and global conflicts, pandemics, natural disasters and various forms of social unrest that disrupt the conventions of knowledge. Conventional ivory tower-style writing and publishing is generally appreciated by intellectuals alone, particularly when it falls within the confines of their own geopolitical niches (Canagarajah 2002). These niches are increasingly shaped by emoscapes linked to commercial interests in higher education (Shahjahan, Sonneveldt, Estera, and Bae 2020). However, the self-admiration of ivory tower scholars is increasingly in conflict with what the public needs in times of complex crises (Gilpin and Murphy 2008). Crisis management often requires unconventional strategies, insights and forward-looking thinking. Meanwhile, many scholars who are overloaded with performativity-oriented pressures of neoliberal scholarship shy away from radical ideas and scholarly activism (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014; Richter, Faragó, Swadener, Roca-Servat, & Eversman 2020). These can undermine their careers and displease resource controllers or employers, who determine the scholars' material well-being (Brunila and Valero 2018). Besides, in the conveyor-belt style of academic production, editors and reviewers

often lack sufficient time to be able to provide quality feedback, especially in innovative areas of research (Smith 2006a, Souder 2011). Novelty and ground-breaking quality can hardly emerge in factory-like knowledge production mode, which is primarily concerned with productivity, citation indexes and impact factors (Gruber 2014, Smith 2006b). The competitive production of papers, many of which are unsought and unread, generates anxiety and toxicity, rather than helpful solutions that contribute to preventing previous mistakes (Yang 2016; Oleksiyenko et al. 2018). As a result, intellectuals are out of touch with the urgent needs of lay and scholarly communities, and problems are not solved on the basis of well-designed research, or well-informed policies and practices.

Understanding these challenges is important for societies and universities that seek to enhance their sustainability. The accelerating pace of current crises reveals a shortage of preventative strategies, which teachers should have been incorporating into learning designs (Eoyang and Mennin 2019). Knowledge production for the sake of performativity and competitiveness is dangerous when there is inadequate response to social crises, and academics are muffled or encouraged to be 'competitive' globally for banal reasons related to preserving the privileges of local powerbrokers (Forrat 2016). Healthy norms of knowledge making in academic communities, institutions and networks are essential for the development of prime knowledge that benefits society at large, rather than just the privileged purchasers of products and services hedging against competition with disadvantaged locals, who have increasing access to higher education (Aydarova 2020). For a better conceptualization of academic leaders', including the innovative outliers', roles and responsibilities in solving societal crises, insights into relations between intellectuals and their communities are critical (Oleksiyenko 2020).

While COVID-19 urges us to rethink the neoliberal design of higher education, and some scholarly communities responded to the challenge enthusiastically (Oleksiyenko et al., 2020; Peters et al.

2020), we certainly need to do more work on re-imagining intellectual leadership within disparate communities of practice facing cascading crises. Among other matters, there is a need for more profound analyses of the interdependencies between knowledge production and outreach across cultures and contexts. Investigating and discussing the premises, intentions and implications of epistemological and communal re-designs and re-imaginings may give us a better perspective on the co-dependence of leadership and communities when creating an intellectually-rich and critically-minded learning environments. At CERC, we are seeking answers to the following questions: What defines intellectual leadership at universities in times of crisis? How do scholars in different societies conceptualise their potential for leadership in crises-driven research, teaching and service? What lessons are intellectual leaders deriving from the challenges they encounter and which of them are they eager to share? We look forward to exploring these questions together with our contributors and readers.

References:

Aydarova, E. (2020). Jokers' pursuit of truth: critical policy analysis in the age of spectacle and post-truth politics. *Critical Studies in Education*, 1-16 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2020.1831566>

Becher, T. & Trowler, P. R. (2001). *Academic tribes and territories*. Buckingham, UK: The Society for Research in Higher Education/ Open University Press.

Brunila, K., & Valero, P. (2018). Anxiety and the making of research(ing) subjects in neoliberal academia. *Subjectivity*, 11(1), 74-89 <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41286-017-0043-9>

Canagarajah, A. S. (2002). *A geopolitics of academic writing*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Christensen, C. M., & Eyring, H. J. (2011). *The innovative university: Changing the DNA of higher education from the inside out*. John Wiley & Sons.

Eoyang, G. H., & Mennin, S. (2019). Wicked problems in health professions education: Adaptive action in action. *MedEdPublish*, 8 <https://doi.org/10.15694/mep.2019.000226.1>

Forrat, N. (2016). The political economy of Russian higher education: why does Putin support research universities?. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 32(4), 299-337 <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2015.1051749>

Gilpin, D. R., & Murphy, P. J. (2008). *Crisis management in a complex world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gruber, T. (2014). Academic sell-out: how an obsession with metrics and rankings is damaging academia. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 24(2), 165-177 <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2014.970248>

Haiven, M. & Khasnabish, D. A. (2014). *The radical imagination: Social movement research in the age of austerity*. Zed Books Ltd.

Macfarlane, B. (2011). Professors as intellectual leaders: Formation, identity and role. *Studies in Higher Education*, 36(1), 57-73 <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903443734>

Macfarlane, B. (2013). *Intellectual leadership in higher education: Renewing the role of the university professor*. London and New York: Routledge.

Macfarlane, B., Zhang, J., & Pun, A. (2014). Academic integrity: a review of the literature. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(2), 339-358
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2012.709495>

Oleksiyenko, A. (2014). On the shoulders of giants? Global science, resource asymmetries, and repositioning of research universities in China and Russia. *Comparative Education Review*, 58(3), 482-508.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/676328>

Oleksiyenko, A. (2015). Internationalization legacies and collaboration challenges: post-imperial hybrids and political fallouts in Russian higher education. *Frontiers of Education in China*, 10(1), 23-45
<https://doi.org/10.3868/s110-004-015-0003-7>

Oleksiyenko, A. (2018). Zones of alienation in global higher education: corporate abuse and leadership failures. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 24(3), 193-205
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2018.1439095>

Oleksiyenko, A. (2020). Academic activism and intellectual leadership. *PATHES*, p. 1-2. Accessed online: <https://pathes.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Oleksiyenko-Final.pdf>

Oleksiyenko, A., & Tierney, W. G. (2018). Higher education and human vulnerability: global failures of corporate design. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 24(3), 187-192
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2018.1439094>

Oleksiyenko, A., & Ruan, N. (2019). Intellectual leadership and academic communities: issues for discussion and research. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 73(4), 406-418. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12199>

Oleksiyenko, A. V., & Jackson, L. (2020). Freedom of speech, freedom to teach, freedom to learn: the crisis of higher education in the post-truth era. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 1-6

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1773800>

Oleksiyenko, A., Blanco, G., Hayhoe, R., Jackson, L., Lee, J., Metcalfe, A., Subramaniam, M. & Zha, Q. (2020). Comparative and international higher education in a new key? Thoughts on the post-pandemic prospects of scholarship. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 1-17

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2020.1838121>

Peters, M. A., Rizvi, F., McCulloch, G., Gibbs, P., Gorur, R., Hong, M., Hwang, Y., Zipin, L., Brennan, M., Robertson, S., Quay, J., Malbon, J., Taglietti, D., Barnett, R., Wang, C., McLaren, P., Apple, R., Papastephanou, M., Burbules, N., Jackson, L., Pankaj, J., Kalantzis, M., Cope, B., Fataar, A., Conroy, J., Misiaszek, G., Biesta, G., Jandrić, P., Choo, S., Apple, M., Stone, L., Tierney, R., Tesar, M., Besley, T. & Misiaszek, L. (2020) Reimagining the new pedagogical possibilities for universities post-Covid-19. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, DOI: [10.1080/00131857.2020.1777655](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1777655)

Richter, J., Faragó, F., Swadener, B. B., Roca-Servat, D., & Eversman, K. A. (2020). Tempered radicalism and intersectionality: scholar-activism in the neoliberal university. *Journal of Social Issues*

<https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12401>

Ruan, N. (2020). Accumulating academic freedom for intellectual leadership: women professors' experiences in Hong Kong. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 1-11.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1773797>

Shahjahan, R. A., Sonneveldt, E. L., Estera, A. L., & Bae, S. (2020). Emoscapes and commercial university rankers: the role of affect in global higher education policy. *Critical Studies in Education*, 1-16

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2020.1748078>

Smith, R. (2006a). Peer review: a flawed process at the heart of science and journals. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 99 (4), 178-182
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/014107680609900414>

Smith, R. (2006b). Commentary: the power of the unrelenting impact factor—is it a force for good or harm?. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 35(5), 1129-1130 <https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyl191>

Souder, L. (2011). The ethics of scholarly peer review: a review of the literature. *Learned Publishing*, 24(1), 55-72
<https://doi.org/10.1087/20110109>

Uslu, B., & Welch, A. (2018). The influence of universities' organizational features on professorial intellectual leadership. *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(3), 571-585
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1185774>

To cite this article:

APA Style: Oleksiyenko, A. (2021). Higher education and intellectual leadership: Amplifying critical inquiry. *Universities & Intellectuals*, 1 (1), 1-11.

Harvard Style: Oleksiyenko, A. 2021. Higher education and intellectual leadership: Amplifying critical inquiry. *Universities & Intellectuals*, 1 (1), pp. 1-11.

Chicago Style: Oleksiyenko, Anatoly. "Higher education and intellectual leadership: Amplifying critical inquiry". *Universities & Intellectuals* 1, no. 1 (2021): 1-11.

MLA Style: Oleksiyenko, A. “Higher education and intellectual leadership: Amplifying critical inquiry”. *Universities & Intellectuals* 1.1 (2021): 1-11.