

Higher Education and Opportunity in Hong Kong

香港高等教育與平等機會

Professor James Z. Lee 李中清教授

University education in Hong Kong is not only among the most highly ranked worldwide, it is also among the most accessible and open anywhere to students of lower means, offering thousands of students every year an opportunity for a four-year university education that will enable those from families from the bottom half of the income distribution to move to the top half. This achievement in social policy deserves to be widely recognized and celebrated – to make sure it continues and to see if Hong Kong universities can – offer transformative opportunities not only to students, but also to Hong Kong itself.

Admission to most Hong Kong public universities is largely according to individual examination performance measured by the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education whose curriculum are offered by every publicly supported Secondary School in Hong Kong. Over 80 percent of local students are admitted as freshman through the Joint University Programmes Admissions System; 10 percent as Associate Degree transfers; and the remaining 10 percent either through Direct Application or other mechanisms. All together 15,000 students qualify each year for university admission,

which represents almost 20 percent of their age cohort.

While the JUPAS program is renowned to be among the most competitive public university systems in the world, second to the National Higher Education Entrance Examination of China, what is less known is its remarkable recent record of open opportunity. **Figure 1** compares the distribution of monthly household income in Hong Kong as a whole in 2009 with the distribution of student family income that year in the eight University Grant Council public universities: Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU), The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), The University of Hong Kong (HKU), The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (HKPU), Lingnan University (LU), The Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd), and City University of Hong Kong (CityU).

In each of these universities over half of the local students come from families below the median monthly household income in Hong Kong which in 2009 was HK\$17,500. Moreover, while the three research universities – The University of Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology – accept fewer students from

poor families and more students from well-off families, the overall contrast between the Big Three and other universities is not that great, except at the extreme ends of the income spectrum.

In contrast, in the United States, students attending so-called High Public, High Private, and Very High Private universities come overwhelmingly from families at the top 20 percent of the income distribution. **Figure 2** compares the distribution of household annual income in the United States with the distribution of student household income from these three types of American universities, similarly in 2009. Households at the top 3 percent of the income distribution provided 20, 25 and 35 percent of all students to High Public, High Private, and Very High Private universities respectively. Households from the top 20 percent of the income distribution provided 55, 60, and 70 percent of all students to High Public, High Private, and Very High Private universities respectively. In contrast, households from the bottom 50 percent of the income distribution provided only 20 percent of all students at these elite universities (Pryor, John H., Sylvia Hurtado, Linda DeAngelo, Laura Palucki Blake, and Serge Tran. 2010. *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2009*. University of California Press.)

In conclusion, if ability is distributed roughly equally in a large population, virtually everyone who qualifies is able to attend university in Hong Kong, regardless of their family income. In the United States, however, many students from high income families are able to attend elite universities while many deserving students from low income families cannot.

香

港的大學教育在全球不但名列前茅，對非富裕學生而言，亦是最能負擔及最為公開的，讓每年數以千計的學生有機會接受4年大學教育，來自收入分布下層家庭的學生，更有可能藉此躋身收入分布的上層。這項社會政策的成果值得廣泛認可及表揚，以確保政策可以持續推行，讓學生可以透過教育改變人生的同時，是否也可以為香港帶來轉機。

大部分香港公立大學主要根據學生在香港中學文憑考試（簡稱「文憑試」）的表現收生，而香港所有受政府資助的中學均提供文憑試課程。超過80%的本地大學生透過大學聯合招生辦法（簡稱「大學聯招辦法」）考入大學一年級，10%由副學士轉入大學，餘下10%則透過直接申請或其他機制考入大學。每年總共有15,000名學生考上大學，佔適齡入讀大學的青年人數接近20%。

大學聯招辦法是全球競爭最激烈的公共大學招生系統之一，競爭之激烈僅次於中國的普通高等學校招生全國統一考試（簡稱「高考」）。近年來，高考提供了極為公開的機會，雖然在這方面的出色紀錄較少受關注。表一比較了2009年香港總體家庭每月收入與同年香港8家由大學資助委員會分配撥款的公共大學的學生家庭收入分布。該8家大學分別為：香港浸會大學、香港中文大學、香港大學、香港科技大學、香港理工大學、嶺南大學、香港教育大學及香港城市大學。

在這8家大學中，每家大學均有超過一半本地學生的家庭每月收入低於中位數（2009年為17,500港元）。此外，雖然三家研究型大學——香港大學、香港中文大學及香港科技大學——招收較少來自貧窮家庭的學生及較多來自富裕家庭的學生，這三大學府與其他大學之間在學生家庭收入方面的總體差別並非很大，除了在最高和最低的入息組別之外。

Hong Kong Undergraduates by Household Income, 2008-2009 香港大學生家庭收入（2008年至2009年）

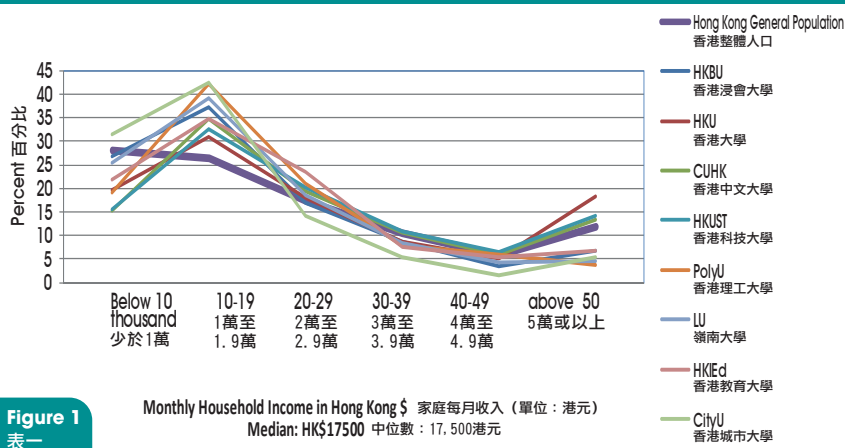


Figure 1 表一

USA Undergraduates by Household Income 美國大學生家庭收入（2009年）

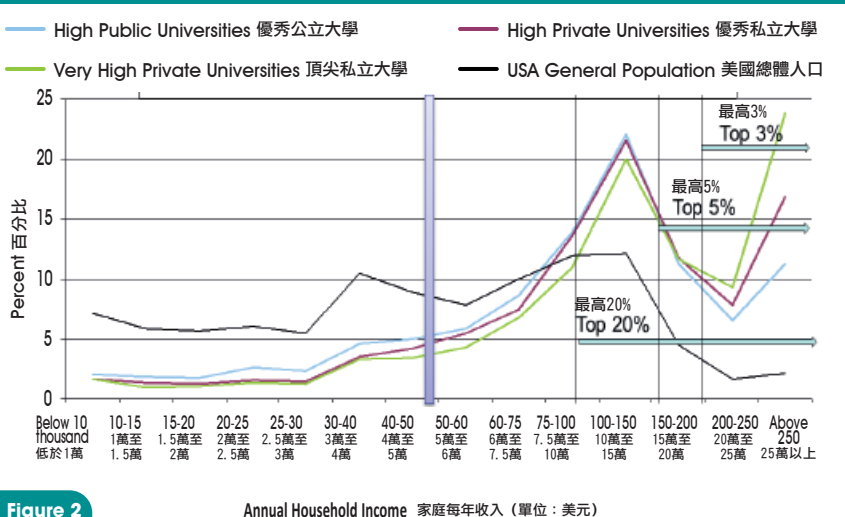


Figure 2 表二

相比之下，美國能夠入讀所謂的「優秀公立大學」、「優秀私立大學」和「頂尖私立大學」的學生，大部分都來自處於收入分布最高20%的家庭。表二比較了同樣在2009年的美國家庭每年收入分布。來自家庭收入最高3%家庭的學生分別佔優秀公立大學、優秀私立大學和頂尖私立大學總學生人數的20%、25%和35%，而來自家庭收入最高20%家庭的學生則分別佔55%、60%和70%。相反，來自家庭收入最低50%家庭的學生則只佔這些精英大學學生數目總和的20% (Pryor, John H., Sylvia Hurtado, Linda DeAngelo, Laura Palucki Blake, and Serge Tran. 2010. *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2009*. University of California Press.)。

總括而言，如果人的能力是大致平均分布於一個人口龐大的社會的話，那麼每一個符合資格的人，不論家庭收入多少，基本上都可在香港入讀大學；相反在美國，許多學生只要出身於高收入家庭便可入讀精英大學，而許多有能力的學生卻因為家庭收入不高而只能卻步。

Professor James Z. Lee is Chair Professor of History and Sociology and Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Science at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. 李中清教授是香港科技大學人文與社會科學學院院長及講座教授。