

The Social History of Higher Education Expansion in Hong Kong (1978 – present)

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Higher education in Hong Kong has undergone tremendous changes in the past three decades, which has transformed the system from elite to mass access. Drawing upon published statistical data and academic literature, this paper attempts to chart and explain the expansion history of higher education in Hong Kong and illustrate the changing patterns of programmes on offer and participation in the field across times. The expansion history is divided into three milestones. During the first period from 1978 to 1999, the expansion project of higher education was largely characterised by the increase of publicly funded first-degree places and initiatives of institutional restructuring. The second phase of expansion since 2001 has witnessed the rapid growth of self-financing institutions which offer a wide range of sub-degree and degree-level courses to secondary school leavers with an aim of reaching 60% of cohort participation rate in ten years' time. Following the academic restructuring in 2012, the history of higher education in Hong Kong has entered into a new milestone. This new phase is characterised by the advent of a more diversified undergraduate curriculum, which is extended into four years of study. The paper is going to explore the trajectory path of the expansion decision as a result of the Government policy decision as well the historical and specific conditions of the higher institutions of Hong Kong, which serves to shape the outlook of the mode of expansion of higher education in Hong Kong.