

Critical thinking, university autonomy, and societal evolution: thoughts on a research agenda

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The proposition

- Universities have the opportunity to globalize the force of the historical 'Republic of Letters' that acted as the main catalyst in the European industrial and societal revolution 1500-2000
- At a time when that leadership may be slipping away
- To do this they have to foster critical thinking
- For this they need to retain their autonomy so as to foster academic freedom
- The critical thinking would allow alternative societal structures to emerge to secure continued human progress
- University autonomy is under growing threat

Societal progress

- Human evolution enacts 4 instincts
- (Survival) - aggression
- - territorialism
- (Progress) - innovativeness
- - cooperativeness

Innovativeness and Cooperativeness

- Expressed in economic/societal progress as
- Schumpeterian growth – innovative
- Smithian growth – cooperative

- In practice, innovation requires a great deal of social interaction with creditors, workers, suppliers, customers, and the authorities, and all these relations involve elements that are part of a 'civil economy'. (Mokyr 2017, p16)

Innovativeness

- (As expressed historically in the Republic of Letters)
- *'We are all equal because we are all the children of Apollo'*
- *Pierre Bayle (1684) Nouvelles de la Republique des Lettres*
- Variety of views and knowledge
- Clusters to foster debate, comparison, and learning (salons, learned societies, coffee houses, publishing, correspondence, visiting, competing)
- Fusion of theorists and practitioners
- Competition for individual reputation and status, based on knowledge
- Societal mechanisms to counter dogma
- Empirical data-gathering plus Baconian inductive science
- Societal legitimacy from the elite (Royal Society, Great Exhibition etc)
- Belief in progress
- Entrepreneurship

Cooperativeness

- Ideals of public goods, of community, and of responsible citizenship
- Law and order seen as fair, consistent and accessible
- Spontaneous bottom-up evolution of systems of reliable order (e.g. professions, voluntary associations)
- Property rights
- Reliable credentials
- Institutionalized trust via reliable application of the above
- Uniting cultural norms, axioms, beliefs, holding together a 'people'
- Respected heritage
- Calculation as opposed to opinion
- Role models
- Morally respected *bourgeoisie* as key actors and catalysts

Universities role now

- Historically while the Republic of Letters was the main arena for Critical Thinking 1500-1850, the Univs in Europe were relatively conservative.
- This then changed and in Europe the main arena for critical thinking became the modern university
- That role is crucial for societal progress, in fostering (a) science and technology to support Innovativeness, and (b) the humanities to support Cooperativeness and good citizenship

Can miracles last? Cardwell's Law

- 'Sooner or later in any society the progress of technology will grind to a halt because the forces that used to support innovation become vested interests... This result holds for a single closed economy. For a set of fragmented and open economies that compete with one another, this result does not hold' (e.g. Western Europe flourished for 500 years, because of the constraint to power and authority due to the separate territories, and to mobility of the cultural entrepreneurs).

• Mokyr 2002, p.278

Cardwell implications

- So
- To continue the innovativeness under globalization there needs to be
 - a means of fostering critical thinking as priority globally - so that the flourishing of innovativeness can expand in the varied world
 - and the leading actor in this is HE

IF HE actorhood can resist (or wear down) entrenched political or dogma-based autocracy.

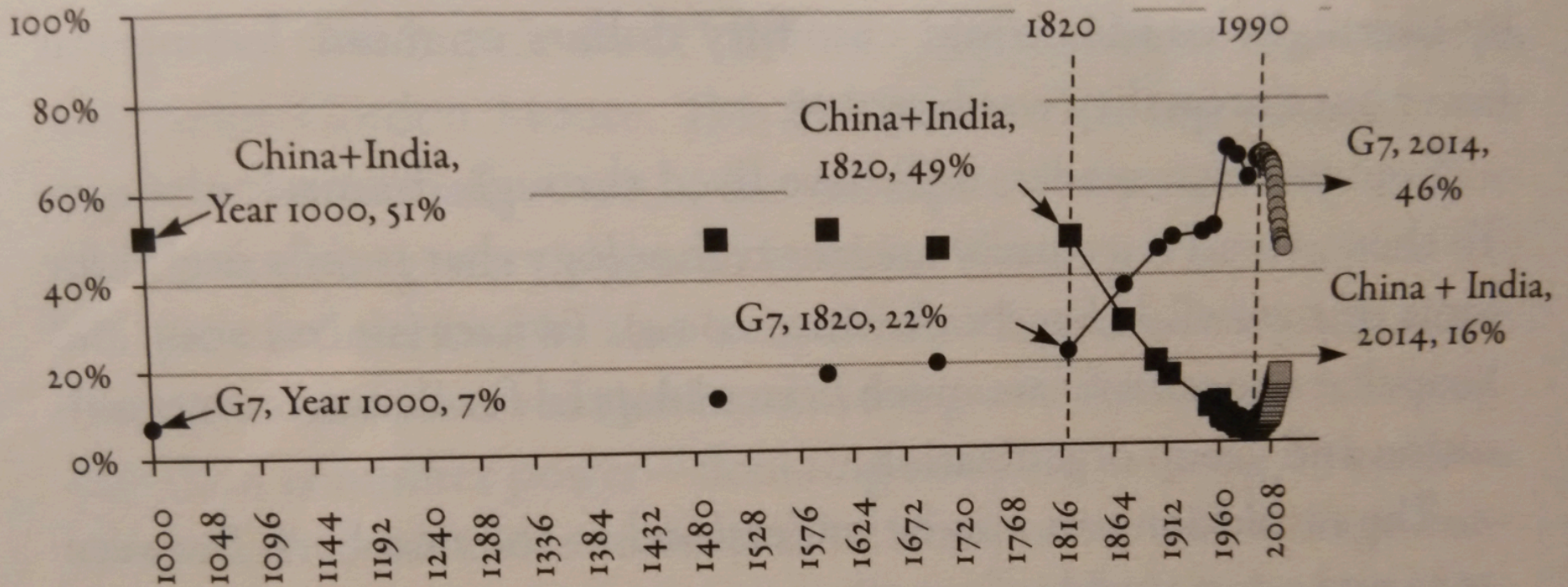


FIGURE 23: Spot the phase transitions: World GDP shares, year 1000 to 2014.

Actorhood as strategic autonomy

- Context
- 1. Widespread reforms across OECD of funding and governance of Univ's, and public research orgs since 1980.
- Often increased delegation of admin and finance control within framework of public policy objectives, plus performance monitoring
- Power shifts to Univ central admin, and away from subject heads
- Trend away from agglomerations of fairly autonomous depts working to norms of their global disciplines, towards supposedly corporate entities operating with independent strategies in pseudo-markets

Actorhood post 1980 -outcomes

- ‘Few, if any, of such attempts have resulted in universities developing organizationally distinctive knowledge and capabilities that might enable them to compete effectively as strategic actors’ (Whitley 2012 p.494)
- Major differences across OECD in Univ structures and properties
- Limited and varied actorhood so far achieved
- Inherent difficulties in managerial coordination and control of highly uncertain research and teaching activities, often influenced (if not determined) by external scientific communities
- Impact of the State varies greatly, but may be restricting of academic freedom/collaboration/critical thinking

Defining 21st Century skills

- Great Schools Partnership: The Glossary of Educational Reform, Creative Commons.

consensus. The following list provides a brief illustrative overview of the knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits commonly associated with 21st century skills:

- Critical thinking, problem solving, reasoning, analysis, interpretation, synthesizing information
- Research skills and practices, interrogative questioning
- Creativity, artistry, curiosity, imagination, innovation, personal expression
- Perseverance, self-direction, planning, self-discipline, adaptability, initiative
- Oral and written communication, public speaking and presenting, listening
- Leadership, teamwork, collaboration, cooperation, facility in using virtual workspaces
- Information and communication technology (ICT) literacy, media and internet literacy, data interpretation and analysis, computer programming
- Civic, ethical, and social-justice literacy
- Economic and financial literacy, entrepreneurialism
- Global awareness, multicultural literacy, humanitarianism
- Scientific literacy and reasoning, the scientific method
- Environmental and conservation literacy, ecosystems understanding
- Health and wellness literacy, including nutrition, diet, exercise, and public health and safety



STRATEGIC AUTONOMY
goals;
organisational identity

ORGANISATIONAL AUTONOMY
student intake;
teaching;
certification

ORGANISATIONAL AUTONOMY
resource allocation;
research organisation

ORGANISATIONAL AUTONOMY
Academic recruitment

● IVY League
 ● UK redbrick
 ● China/State

KEY SURROUNDING INFLUENCES

- A** = State delegation of discretion over organisational identity, goals
- B** = State delegation of discretion over managerial coordination
- C** = Dependence on state funding
- D** = Concentration of control over state funding
- E** = National oligarchic control of academic careers
- F** = Interventionist public administration regime
- G** = State control of elite labour markets
- H** = Importance of research intensive industries

TYPES OF UNIVERSITIES

(a continuum of ideal types)



Table 1 Characteristics of four ideal types of universities as organisational actors

Characteristic	Ideal type			
	Hollow	State-contracted	State-chartered	Private-portfolio
Extent of strategic autonomy over goals and organisational identity	None	Negotiated with ministry, usually limited	Medium	High
Extent of organisational authority over academic recruitment	None	Low to medium	Medium to high	High
Extent of organisational authority over student recruitment, teaching programmes and certification	None or very little	Low to medium	Medium to high	High
Extent of organisational authority over resource allocation and the organisation of research and teaching activities	None	Low to medium	Medium to high	High

Table 2 Proximate and background conditions of different types of university

Proximate conditions	Ideal types of universities			
	Hollow	State-contracted	State-chartered	Private-portfolio
State delegation of discretion over organisational identity, goals and strategies	None	Limited	Medium	High
State delegation of discretion over managerial coordination and control	None	Medium	High	High
Dependence on state funding	High	High	High	Low to medium
Concentration of control over state funding	High	Medium to High	Medium to high	Low to medium
National “oligarchic” control of academic careers	High	Medium to high	Low to medium	Low
Background Conditions				
Interventionist public administration regime	High	High	Low	Low
State control of elite labour markets	High	High	Limited	Limited
Importance of research intensive industries	Varies	Varies	Medium	Medium to high

The new globalization

- Richard Baldwin (2016) *The Great Convergence*, Harvard Univ Press.
- Trade and prosperity depend on fitting together **goods, ideas, people**.
- **Pre-modern**. All three in one place
- **The first Unbundling**: 1820 -1990, shipping costs collapsed, production and consumption separated. G7 became rich.
- **The second Unbundling**: 1990 to now, communication costs collapsed, integrated global separation of production systems. Massive flows of know-how North to South. Value-chain revolution re-drew the boundaries of knowledge. G7 loses monopoly on wealth.
- **The third Unbundling**: depends on whether face to face costs collapse (using new technologies).
 - If so, then (a) more fine-grained effects on e.g. jobs, and viability of firms
 - (b) Govt power to control flow of ideas weakens, so unpredictability.
 - (c) Unit of action is not state but firm.
 - (d) G7 compact between workers and firms is ruptured.
 - (e) some developing countries disfavoured by low trust over information.
 - (f) Globally competitive firms knit together national competitive advantages.