

Analysis of Influencing Factors in University Admissions Between Mainland China and Hong Kong in the Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract

In the post pandemic era, the global study abroad market has undergone significant changes, and the uncertainty of traditional overseas study has increased. Mainland and Hong Kong universities, with their unique advantages, have become the core choice for students' further education. In this context, the direction of educational resource flow, policy adjustments, and changes in the employment market all have an impact on the choice of further education. This article identifies five core influencing factors: policy support and enrollment mechanisms, educational resources and training models, economic costs and cost-effectiveness, employment prospects and regional integration, and social environment and adaptability. Research has found that the internationalization policies of Hong Kong universities, the advantages of local resources in mainland universities, and the trend of integrated development in the Guangdong Hong Kong Macao Greater Bay Area are key factors influencing the choice of further education. Different families and students exhibit differentiated preferences due to differences in economic conditions, academic planning, and career aspirations. This article clarifies the impact logic of various factors by reviewing authoritative policy documents, enrollment data, and employment reports, providing reference for students and parents' decisions on further education, as well as ideas for optimizing the allocation of higher education resources in both regions.

Keywords

In the post-pandemic era, factors influencing higher education choices for students in mainland China and Hong Kong universities.

1. Introduction

After 2020, the spread of the COVID-19 has completely changed the pace of development of higher education, and the traditional route of studying abroad is no longer an inevitable choice for students [1]. Immigration restrictions, cross-border travel risks, and uncertainty in overseas campus management have led many families to reconsider their academic pursuits, highlighting the unique value of universities in mainland China and Hong Kong.

As an international education hub, Hong Kong's teaching characteristics of integrating Chinese and Western elements, as well as its deep linkage with the Guangdong Hong Kong Macao Greater Bay Area, have made it a favored choice for many mainland students; Mainland universities, with national policy support, solid discipline construction, and close integration with the local job market, remain the top choice for most students to pursue further education. Taking the University of Hong Kong as an example, in the 2018/2019 academic year, there were only 1785 mainland undergraduate students, accounting for 45% of non local students. By the 2023/2024 academic year, the number had increased to 3180, accounting for 63.4%. The growth trend in the post pandemic period is very obvious. At the same time, the construction of "Double First Class" in mainland China continues to advance, and the quality of scientific research and talent cultivation has steadily improved. Currently, 145 mainland universities

recognize Hong Kong DSE scores, attracting various sources of students including Hong Kong students.

The choice of further education is never simply about selecting universities, but rather an important decision related to individual growth, family planning, and regional talent mobility. Under the background of the post epidemic situation, the differences and linkage between universities in the two regions in terms of policies, resources, costs, employment, etc. have formed a complex decision-making environment. This article is based on authoritative policy documents, enrollment data, and employment reports, systematically dismantling the core influencing factors of college admission choices, aiming to provide rational references for students and parents, as well as ideas for the coordinated development of higher education in the two regions.

2. Policy Support and Enrollment Mechanism: The Core Orientation of College Entrance Selection

In the post pandemic era, policy adjustments and optimization of enrollment mechanisms in mainland and Hong Kong universities are the primary factors affecting the choice of further education. The Hong Kong SAR government continues to introduce favorable policies to build an "international hub for tertiary education". The 2023 policy address will increase the quota for non local students in subsidized tertiary institutions from 20% to 40% (effective from the 2024/25 academic year), and the 2025 policy address will further clarify that it will be relaxed to 50% starting from the 2026/27 academic year, significantly expanding the enrollment opportunities for mainland students [2].

According to enrollment data, the University of Hong Kong admitted about 360 mainland students through the college entrance examination in the 2024/25 academic year, and plans to increase the number to 400 in the 2025/26 academic year; The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology plans to enroll 250 mainland high school entrance examination students for the 2024/25 academic year, but has actually admitted over 300 students. The policy dividend has directly driven the increase in application popularity. The enrollment mechanism of Hong Kong universities is diverse and flexible, represented by the University of Science and Technology of Hong Kong, which implements independent enrollment without occupying the college entrance examination unified admission preferences. It recognizes various scores such as the college entrance examination, IB, A-Level, and has special preferential policies to break the limitations of a single evaluation system.

Mainland universities rely on national policies to continuously optimize their systems. By 2025, 145 universities will recognize Hong Kong DSE scores, covering numerous 985 and 211 universities, providing convenient pathways for Hong Kong students to further their education. At the same time, the construction of the "Double First Class" in mainland China strengthens basic and emerging disciplines, and through special plans, research guarantee policies, etc., builds a stable pathway for local students to further their education.

It is worth noting that the Hong Kong 2025 Policy Address explicitly targets "high school entrance examination immigration", tightens the requirements for local students to reside in Hong Kong, and sets a transition period to be officially implemented by 2028, promoting more rational choices for further education. The policies of the two places have their own focuses. Hong Kong focuses on attracting international talents, while the mainland focuses on cultivating local talents. Policy stability and guidance have become important considerations for students when making decisions.

3. Educational Resources and Training Models: The Core Support for Academic Development

The quality of educational resources and the adaptability of training models are the core considerations for choosing to pursue higher education. Hong Kong universities have formed a unique advantage by relying on international faculty and cutting-edge courses. Among the eight major universities, the proportion of scholars with mainland backgrounds has been increasing year by year, and they have become an important force in the teaching staff - they have both international perspectives and local knowledge, which have elevated the quality of scientific research and teaching to a higher level. The disciplines are closely aligned with market demand, with majors such as artificial intelligence, big health, and modern finance being highly favored. The dental program at the University of Hong Kong consistently ranks among the top in the QS Global Rankings, and graduates' starting salaries far exceed the industry average, demonstrating strong competitiveness in the field.

In terms of training mode, Hong Kong universities highlight the integration of Chinese and Western cultures and practical orientation. The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology has launched an undergraduate research program, where sophomore students can join professor teams to participate in scientific research. The program is taught entirely in English and has a flexible study mechanism, which can help students quickly adapt to international academic norms and cultivate cross-cultural communication skills. It is highly attractive to students planning to pursue further studies overseas or enter multinational corporations.

Mainland universities have formed advantages in integrating local resources and deepening discipline construction. Through the construction of the "Double First Class" initiative, mainland universities have established a complete discipline system in basic science, engineering technology, humanities and social sciences, and some disciplines have reached the world's leading level. As a model of cooperation in running schools between the mainland and Hong Kong, Beijing Normal University - Hong Kong Baptist University United International College has introduced Hong Kong's advanced education management system, implemented the "double tutor system" (under the joint guidance of university professors and industry experts), and more than 70% of its undergraduate graduates have entered the world's top 100 universities for further study.

The training mode of mainland universities places more emphasis on local practice and cultivating patriotism, and connects with domestic industry demand through industry university research cooperation bases and internship and training projects. For example, the "8-year" training system of top medical schools in mainland China, although highly competitive, can provide students with a stable local practice path. In the post pandemic era, students choose to be more pragmatic, either pursuing the international perspective of Hong Kong universities or leaning towards the local resource adaptability of mainland universities. The matching degree between academic planning and training models has become a key decision-making factor [3].

4. Economic cost and cost-effectiveness: realistic constraints on family decision-making

The economic cost is an undeniable factor in the choice of further education. In the post pandemic period, the stability of household income has been affected to some extent, and there is a greater emphasis on risk control and long-term returns in education expenditure. The consideration of the cost-effectiveness of education investment is more detailed and diverse. The cost of higher education in Hong Kong is significantly higher than that in mainland China,

with the cost difference concentrated in the two core areas of tuition and living expenses. The tuition fees for non local undergraduate students in public universities in Hong Kong are approximately HKD 120000 to HKD 160000 per year, while those in private universities reach HKD 140000 to HKD 200000. In contrast, the tuition fees for general majors in public universities in mainland China are only RMB 4000-6000, while the tuition fees for universities in Hong Kong are about 20-30 times higher than those in mainland China; In terms of living expenses, on campus dormitories in Hong Kong cost HKD 30000 to HKD 60000 per year, while off campus rentals vary significantly depending on the location of the campus. The monthly rent in the core area can reach HKD 3000-12000, plus expenses such as food and transportation. The annual living expenses are about HKD 80000 to HKD 250000, while those in mainland universities cost only HKD 12000 to HKD 20000 per year. The overall education cost in Hong Kong is about 10-20 times that of mainland China.

The Hong Kong SAR government and various universities have established various subsidies such as government scholarships, institutional special awards, and enterprise naming awards. The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology can provide up to one year of tuition fee waivers for winners of national subject competitions. The University of Hong Kong's "Diversified Excellence Admission Program" provides bonus points and scholarship support for students with special talents, but such policies have limited coverage and are difficult to change the overall cost difference pattern.

The high cost-effectiveness of mainland universities is the core attraction. In addition to low tuition and living expenses, they also have a diversified support system such as national scholarships, school level special grants, student loans, and work study programs. According to publicly available data from the Ministry of Education (sourced from the annual report of the Student Financial Assistance Management Center), this system covers over 30% of students and runs through the entire academic cycle, ensuring that students with different economic conditions can successfully complete their studies. For families with limited budgets, mainland universities, especially applied majors, have a more competitive ratio of training costs to employment returns.

Some families who originally planned to study abroad in Europe and America have turned to Hong Kong universities due to high costs and uncertainty, but most families still choose mainland universities based on their economic strength. Cost performance considerations include both direct costs and implicit factors such as employment returns and development opportunities. Hong Kong universities' high investment corresponds to international employment advantages and high starting salaries, while mainland universities' low investment provides a stable local development path. This differentiated choice is essentially a precise match between family resources and personal development goals [4].

5. Employment prospects and regional integration: key considerations for long-term development

In the post pandemic era, the regional characteristics of the job market have become increasingly evident. The integrated development of the Guangdong Hong Kong Macao Greater Bay Area provides broad employment opportunities for graduates from universities in both regions and has become a key influencing factor in their choice of further education [5].

The employment advantages of Hong Kong university graduates are concentrated in international platforms and policy support. Non local graduates can obtain a two-year free work permit in Hong Kong through IANG visas, and can apply for renewal after the visa expires. Some companies also provide career development guidance for them, providing more comprehensive protection for their development in Hong Kong. About 30% of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology graduates from mainland China are directly employed,

concentrated in finance, Internet and other industries, and employed in well-known enterprises such as Morgan Stanley and Google. The starting salary level is significantly higher than that of similar jobs in mainland China.

Mainland university graduates rely on the huge demand of the local job market to demonstrate stable employment competitiveness. The mainland has introduced multiple policies to promote the employment of college graduates, especially recruitment programs such as "Million Talents Gathering in Southern Guangdong", which have opened up a large number of high-end positions for Hong Kong and Macao talents. Over 60% of mainland graduates from Hong Kong tend to stay in the Greater Bay Area for development. The advantages of mainland universities in accumulating local enterprise resources and industry networks help students integrate into the job market more quickly. Some majors, such as teacher education, medicine, engineering, etc., have obvious employment advantages for graduates in positions within the system compared to state-owned enterprises.

The deep integration of the Guangdong Hong Kong Macao Greater Bay Area has further blurred the boundaries of employment between the two regions, and the simplification of cross-border employment procedures has reduced the cost of talent mobility. The mechanism for mutual recognition of professional qualifications is constantly advancing, and the practice fields of medicine, law and other majors continue to expand. Policies such as "Hong Kong and North China" and "New Talent Policies" have optimized the environment for talent mobility. Graduates from Beijing Normal University - Hong Kong Baptist University United International College are included in the IANG policy scope, realizing the seamless connection of "studying in the mainland+developing in Hong Kong". This cross regional development path has become the preferred choice for some students.

The correlation between academic choices and employment planning is becoming increasingly close. Students who plan to engage in international business, financial innovation and other fields are more inclined to choose Hong Kong universities; Students who hope to develop and deeply cultivate traditional industries within the local system prefer mainland universities. In the post pandemic era, the uncertainty of the job market has prompted students to pay more attention to the stability of employment policies and the sustainability of development space. The cross regional employment opportunities brought by regional integration have also become important variables affecting their decisions on further education.

6. Social environment and adaptability: important guarantees for individual development

The safety of the social environment, cultural adaptability, and convenience of life are important guarantee factors for the choice of further education in the post pandemic era. As an international city with stable social order and a safe educational environment, Hong Kong provides students with a more reliable learning and living environment compared to the security risks of some overseas countries. At the same time, the cultural foundation of Hong Kong and the mainland, which share the same roots and origins, reduces the cost of cultural adaptation for mainland students. The diverse and inclusive social atmosphere can also help students expand their international horizons. This combination of "low adaptation cost+high international value" has become one of its core attractions [6].

The social environment of mainland universities is more in line with local employment needs, with seamless integration of campus culture, teaching modes, interpersonal communication, and secondary education. Students do not have to go through complex adaptation, and can focus on their studies and accumulate the necessary skills for the workplace more quickly. Rich club activities and diverse social practice platforms can help students comprehensively improve their overall quality. In addition, the vast territory and rich cultural resources in mainland China

provide practical opportunities, which can be directly transformed into employment competitiveness and help to connect with the workplace.

The matching degree between cultural adaptability and personal traits directly affects the academic experience. The teaching model of Hong Kong universities emphasizes autonomy and critical thinking, with frequent classroom interactions and high requirements for language proficiency and independent learning ability; Mainland universities pay more attention to the systematic and solid knowledge system, and the teaching pace is relatively stable. Some students choose to return to mainland China due to their inability to adapt to the fast-paced life and high-intensity academic pressure in Hong Kong, while others lean towards Hong Kong universities due to their desire for independent development space.

In the post pandemic era, information transparency has become an important factor affecting adaptability. Hong Kong universities actively break the information gap with mainland students through online lectures, offline education exhibitions, and other methods. Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and other universities go deep into mainland secondary schools to carry out enrollment promotion, answer personalized questions such as interview process and major selection. Mainland universities also help students understand diverse educational models through international exchange programs, campus open days, and other means. The reduction of information asymmetry enables students to more accurately assess their adaptability to the university environment and avoid blind decision-making.

7. Conclusion

In the context of the post epidemic situation, the choice of further education for universities in mainland China and Hong Kong is determined by five core factors: policy orientation, educational resources, economic costs, employment prospects, and social adaptability. Hong Kong universities, with international policy support, cutting-edge training models, and employment dividends in the Greater Bay Area, have become the preferred choice for students pursuing an international perspective and high-end employment; Mainland universities attract students who focus on stable development and cost control with solid disciplinary foundations, high cost-effectiveness, and local employment guarantees.

At the policy level, the policy of expanding enrollment of non local students in Hong Kong complements the "Double First Class" construction in mainland China, and the integrated development of the Guangdong Hong Kong Macao Greater Bay Area provides cross regional development opportunities for students from both regions. The dynamic adjustment of policies requires students to consider both opportunities and risks when making decisions. In terms of educational resources, the internationalization advantage of Hong Kong universities and the depth of local resources of mainland universities meet different academic planning needs, and the differences in training modes require students to choose based on their own learning characteristics.

The economic cost remains an important constraint for most families, and the high investment and high return of Hong Kong universities, as well as the cost-effectiveness advantage of mainland universities, correspond to different family economic conditions and return expectations. The employment prospects and social adaptability focus on long-term development and individual experience. The convenience of employment and the reduction of cultural adaptation costs brought about by regional integration have become important decision variables in the post pandemic era.

Overall, there is no absolute superiority or inferiority in the choice of further education. The key lies in the degree of matching with individual needs, family conditions, and career planning. Students should combine their own characteristics and employment plans, weigh the weights of various factors, and make rational judgments on the suitability of universities in both places;

Families need to view education investment and returns rationally, and not blindly follow the trend. In the future, with the further integration of higher education resources between the two regions, the choices for further education will be broader, and rational decision-making and precise matching will be the key to students' academic and career development. Universities should adjust their policies, training models, and employment services to meet the demand for talent in the post pandemic era, enhance their attractiveness, and contribute to the talent cultivation and regional development of both regions.

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