

The Liberal Arts Project in the Hong Kong Context: The Role of Community, Scale, and Transnational Alliance Work

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Analysis of selected strands in the institutional history of Lingnan University, Hong Kong's only government-funded liberal arts university, allows for progress on various fronts. More specifically, it helps (a) to shed light on the pragmatics of developing definitions of 'liberal arts' well suited to the Chinese context; (b) to pinpoint specific challenges associated with relevant kinds of institution building; and (c) to identify some of the inherently valuable strategies for meeting them. Issues of definition invite consideration of the relative suitability of various liberal arts models for Hong Kong, a context where institutions at once operate within a One Country, Two Systems framework and make reference to far more ancient practices and conceptions, some of them Confucian. In this connection, the point will be to argue that Lingnan University's commitment to Service Learning reflects assessments of the relative suitability of various models of liberal arts education and a preferred emphasis (as, for example, at liberal arts institutions in Pakistan, Beirut, and Saudi Arabia) on community, as opposed to citizenship. Seen through the lens of Lingnan University's institutional history, the challenges associated with the project of building robust liberal arts-style institutions in the contemporary Hong Kong Chinese context are considerable. Some of the challenges are specific to Lingnan, as a Tuen Mun (rather than Hong Kong island) institution, where core values are a matter of offering a "second chance" to students categorized as weak by examination results, and of constituting a student body from amongst the lower income segments of society. Yet, there are other challenges that arise from the liberal arts project itself, not just in the context of Hong Kong and China, but on a more global basis. In this regard focus is best given to the implications of scale, liberal arts institutions being by definition "small." Reference will be made in this regard to Lingnan University's very active role in the Global Liberal Arts Alliance (GLAA), from 2012 onwards. The aim will be to explain why Lingnan University sees transnational alliance work as critical to its survival and thriving, and to the further development of the liberal arts project to which it is committed.

Biographical Note

Mette Hjort is Chair Professor of Visual Studies at Lingnan University, Affiliate Professor of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Washington, Seattle, and Adjunct Professor at the Centre for Modern European Studies at the University of Copenhagen. At Lingnan she also serves as Associate Vice President (Academic Quality Assurance & Internationalisation). Mette holds degrees from McGill University in Canada (BA Hons. English; MA Communications) and from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris (PhD/nouveau doctorat, Centre de Recherches sur les Arts et le Langage). Mette's research has focused on the cinema of small nations, with an emphasis on practitioner's agency, creativity under constraint, artistic projects as complements to cultural policy, gift culture, and alternatives to zero-sum reasoning. She has published four monographs, including *The Strategy of*

Letters (Harvard University Press) and *Small Nation, Global Cinema* (University of Minnesota Press). Her edited books include, most recently, *Creativity and Academic Activism* (with Meaghan Morris; Duke University Press & Hong Kong University Press) and *The Education of the Filmmaker in Europe, Asia, and Australia* and *The Education of the Filmmaker in Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas* (Palgrave Macmillan). Her current research is funded by the RGC and focuses on the implications of practice-based film education for filmmakers' values and social aspirations, especially in the context of transnational training initiatives. In this connection she has assisted with training programs at Gaston Kaboré's alternative film school, Imagine, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.