

# A Bourdieusian Analysis of 64 Students Pursuing a Second Chance in a Community College in Hong Kong



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By

Yi-Lee Wong

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academics, colleagues, doctoral students, and friends. Furthermore, I shared with my students in classes at Chinese University of Hong Kong—frontline teachers (who took the course of ‘Structure and Process of Schooling’) or undergraduates (who took the course of ‘Understanding Schooling and Education Policy in Hong Kong’) or graduates (who took the course of ‘Qualitative Methods in Educational Settings’)—my ideas derived from the project as well as some analyses of its specific findings at the time. I received comments from academics, colleagues, doctoral students, friends, and course-specific students, either through our discussions or their questions posed to me after my sharing. And I got inspired by their comments. I thank them all for their comments and insights. Their comments are of importance to my writing up on this project and also to its further development. Indeed, as listed below, I have been using the material of the project and the analyses at different times to address a variety of issues that appeared as substantially different versions from this book in a book chapter, another book, and a number of journal articles. Needless to mention, such insights are of vital importance to the writing of this book. Although I used Bourdieu’s concepts to analyse some specific findings in several journal articles and even in some parts of another book, I have never applied Bourdieu’s framework and concepts consistently to make sense of experiences of respondents of this project, especially in relation to their evaluations and feelings about their selves. This book is such an attempt.

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Wong, Yi-Lee. 2021c. "Student Alienation in Higher Education under Neoliberalism and Global Capitalism: A Case of Community-College Students' Instrumentalism in Hong Kong" *Community College Review* 50, no.1, 96-116.

Wong, Yi-Lee. 2021b. "An emotive operation of neo-liberalism in higher education: Seeking a second chance in Hong Kong" *Community College Review* 49, no.1, 76-95.

Wong, Yi-Lee. 2021a. "Understanding potential dynamics between transfer and native students in top-ranking universities in Hong Kong: The relevance of a sense of legitimacy" *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 45, no. 12, 880-895.

Wong, Yi-Lee. 2020b. "'Entitlement' and 'Legitimacy' as emotional capital: living out class through a critical educational failure by community-college students in Hong Kong" *Studies in Higher Education* (published online 4 June 2020).

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Wong, Yi-Lee. 2019. "Angels falling from grace? The rectification experiences of middle-class community-college students in Hong Kong" *Studies in Higher Education* 44, no.8, 1303-1315.

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Wong, Yi-Lee. 2017. "Class Differentials in getting Parental Assistance for seeking a Second Chance of getting into University: An illustration of Community-College Students in Hong Kong" *Higher Education* 74, no.1, 163-178.

Wong, Yi-Lee. 2016. "Self-explanation, Self-evaluation, Legitimation of Social Inequality: The Case of Community-college Students in Hong Kong" *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 21, no.2, 252-266.

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Wong, Yi-Lee. 2011. "Community College Students in Hong Kong: Class Differences in Various States of Cultural Capital and their Conversion" *Journal of Literature, Culture and Literary Translation* 1, no.2, <http://www.sic-journal.org/en/past-issues/2/literature-and-culture/yi-lee-wong-community-college-students-in-hong-kong-class-differences-in-various-states-of-cultural-capital-and-their-conversion>

Wong, Yi-Lee. 2010. "Middle-class losers?: The role of emotion in educational careers" in *Growing Gaps: Educational Inequality Around the World*, edited by Attewell, Paul and Newman, Katherine S., 162-184, New York: Oxford University Press.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

GPA	grade point average
HKALE	The Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination
HKCEE	The Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination
HKDSE	The Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination
JUPAS	Joint University Programmes Admissions System
SAR	Special Administrative Region
UGC	The University Grants Committee



# INTRODUCTION

The last few decades have witnessed a continuous expansion of the sector of university education—and the sector of higher education more generally—in many industrial-capitalist societies, suggesting that even when students fail to get straight into university, a second chance should become more readily available to them. However, empirical effort to examine educational experiences of students who seek a second chance of getting a university place immediately after their first attempt fails has been woefully inadequate. This book seeks to apply Bourdieu's analysis of class inequality through education to make sense of such educational experiences. Specifically, this book refers to a qualitative study of middle-class and working-class students pursuing such a second chance in Hong Kong through a newly available option of community college. The idea of community college was brought from the USA to Hong Kong by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government in the year of 2000. Through the community college policy, the government intended to provide a greater proportion of relevant-age students with a post-secondary education (rather than a university education) in a decade: namely, a liberal-arts education through an associate degree. Although the community college policy has been launched for more than two decades, community college education in Hong Kong has remained under-explored and educational experiences of Hong Kong community-college students under-examined. Needless to mention, not much empirical effort has been made to address the question of how specificities of this newly available second chance in Hong Kong impact on community-college students' educational experiences.

This book is an empirical application of Bourdieu's framework and concepts to address three sets of questions. The first set of questions are about how middle-class and working-class students come to make the same decision of seeking a second chance in a community college and then how they take advantage of this second chance towards the goal of transfer so as to obtain a university place. The second set of questions are about how characteristics of community college in Hong Kong could potentially impact on self-evaluations of its students of the two classes. And the third set of questions are about the emotional aspect of educational experiences of middle-class and working-class students in pursuing this second chance,

the potential impact of the characteristics of community college on feelings of students of the two classes about themselves particularly.

Ever since the launch of the community college policy in 2000, community college—because of the transfer function of an associate degree—has been taken up as an alternative second chance by students who fail to get straight into university through the old route of sitting the required public examination(s). Chapter 1 will depict the general background for this book: providing an overview of the development of community college in Hong Kong. Chapter 2 will lay the theoretical basis of this book: introducing Bourdieu's framework for analysing class reproduction through education, his three concepts of habitus, cultural capital, and field, and the concept of emotional capital derived further from an extension of his theoretical framework. Chapter 2 will then suggest that Bourdieu's framework and concepts could also be applied to make sense of the operation of class through a second chance in the field of higher education. And within Bourdieu's framework, community college could be seen as a low social status sub-field of higher education. Chapters 1 and 2 together provide the social context and the theoretical context within which 64 respondents of the qualitative study reported in this book sought a newly available second chance. Chapter 3 will report on how this qualitative study begun in academic year 2005-2006 has been designed, conducted, and developed over more than a decade.

With all this background information, four empirical chapters will follow 64 respondents' educational trajectories and provide readers with an analysis of their educational experiences in seeking this specific second chance in a community college. Each empirical chapter begins with stories of some selected respondents; their stories serve to provide an empirical basis for quotations in discussion and analysis undertaken in each chapter. Chapter 4 will compare how middle-class and working-class respondents ruled out other educational options and came to make the same decision of seeking a new, expensive, risky, and second-rate second chance in this particular community college. A theoretical concern is how the habitus and cultural capital of their respective parents was translated into the very same educational decision of middle-class and working-class respondents. This comparison will also underscore the importance of parental assistance in making this same decision possible for respondents of the two classes.

Chapter 5 will investigate how respondents of the two classes performed at community college. The investigation focuses on how the habitus and cultural capital of middle-class respondents and that of working-class

respondents enabled them respectively to meet academic requirements set by this particular community college as a sub-field of the field of higher education in Hong Kong so that they would eventually achieve a transfer. By referring to how far middle-class respondents could be seen as being at an advantage vis-à-vis working-class respondents at community college towards the goal of transfer, this investigation will address the issue of whether community college could be seen as a middle-class institution.

Chapter 6 will examine how respondents of the two classes saw their selves at different stages of seeking a second chance in this community college as a low social status sub-field of higher education and also how they respectively narrated their experiences of seeking this second chance. Their self-evaluations and narratives could be seen as providing a perspective rarely addressed in existing studies on the operation of habitus and cultural capital in the field of education: that is, how the habitus of respondents of the middle and working classes made them see themselves in a low social status sub-field of higher education and also enabled them to cope with such self-evaluations in this low social status sub-field. This perspective will, then, point to some potential hidden injuries of the education system of Hong Kong.

Chapter 7 will analyse how middle-class and working-class respondents felt about themselves throughout the course of pursuing this second chance in a low social status sub-field of higher education and also how their respective parents felt about their pursuits. An analysis of feelings of respondents of the two classes could illustrate their emotional struggles in seeking this second chance, and demonstrate the relevance of classed emotional capital manifested in middle-class entitlement and working-class lack of legitimacy to making sense of such struggles for the middle and working classes. This analysis of respondents' feelings, together with their parents' feelings, then suggests a mechanism for the reproduction of class inequality over generations through the transmission of emotional capital to respondents from their parents.

In the conclusion, I shall summarise major findings reported in the four empirical chapters and then address roles of a second chance in class inequality in higher education. In addition, I shall underscore a theoretical suggestion derived from this empirical application of Bourdieu's analysis. A class contrast in orientation to making sense of (academic) challenges posed in different educational contexts could be theorised as a form of classed habitus: middle-class situational interpretation as opposed to working-class direct understanding. This classed habitus, together with

classed emotional capital manifested in middle-class entitlement and working-class lack of legitimacy, then offers an additional mechanism for understanding the operation of class in education through emotions. Finally, I shall end this book with some further thoughts on implications of this study's findings for roles of parenting in social legitimation and for roles of the middle class in democratic development and social progression.



# CHAPTER 1

## COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN HONG KONG

This book is about stories of 64 students seeking a transfer to university at community college in Hong Kong. In order to enable readers to make sense of their stories, this chapter will depict major characteristics of community college and the education system in Hong Kong. In particular, it reports on the background within which the community college policy is implemented and underscores changes that this policy has brought to the sector of higher education.

At the end of the last century, the first Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government announced the Year 2000 education reform, because it anticipated that the economic restructuring of Hong Kong and the advent of a knowledge economy would require a very different quality of the working population. The government argued that the future workforce should be equipped with a post-secondary qualification, as opposed to a bachelor's degree, so that they would be able to meet challenges of a different economy in a new era. Therefore, the government sought to increase the proportion of relevant-age students with a post-secondary qualification from the existing 34% to 60% in a decade (Education Commission Report 2000). To this end, in 2000 the government launched the community college policy that sought to offer relevant-age students a liberal-arts-oriented associate degree.

Meanwhile, the Year 2000 education reform brought significant changes to basic education. It was planned that in 2012 the old model of five-year secondary education, two-year matriculation, and three-year university education would be replaced by the new model of three-year junior secondary education, three-year senior secondary education, and four-year university education. This change in basic education in 2012 is expected to have a subsequent impact on the development of community college.

What should be underscored is that the Hong Kong SAR government relied on the self-financing sector of post-secondary education to implement the community college policy. Operationally speaking, the government encouraged

educational institutions to offer associate-degree programmes or to set up community colleges to offer such programmes. The government provided those institutions with limited subsidies such as the Start-up Loan Scheme, the Land Grant Scheme, and the Accreditation Grant Scheme (Education and Manpower Bureau 2008). Meanwhile, the government has kept the same annual quota of first-year first-degree places at universities funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) for relevant-age students. What all these measures mean is that community college in Hong Kong is rather different from its US counterpart. In particular, community college in Hong Kong is essentially taken up as an expensive and risky second chance of getting a place at university, preferably at a UGC-funded university.

In what follows, the first part of this chapter will provide an overview of the existing education system in Hong Kong, highlighting new routes to university created by the community college policy and elaborating on why community college is then seen as an expensive and risky second chance. The second and third parts will respectively discuss subsequent changes brought by the community college policy to the sub-degree sector of higher education and the sector of university education. The last part will summarise the recent development of community college ever since 2012.

### **The existing education system in Hong Kong**

At present, basic education is free and universal in Hong Kong. The acts of free, universal, and compulsory six-year and nine-year and twelve-year education passed respectively in 1971 and 1978 and 2012 have made it free and compulsory for each school-age student to receive an increasing number of years of education over the last few decades. In addition, the act of a fifteen-year education (i.e., a twelve-year basic education and a three-year pre-school nursery education) passed in 2018 even makes it possible for school-age children to have a free pre-school education.

Whereas basic education in Hong Kong is universal, university education remains selective. But over the years the system of university education in Hong Kong has become less elitist. The last few decades have witnessed an increase in the proportion of relevant-age students having a university education: the proportion was only about 2% in the 1960s; but it was increased to about 5% in the 1980s and then to about 8-18% between the 1990s and the 2010s. Specifically, an increase in this proportion to 8% in 1990 and then drastically to 16-18% in 1995 was a strategic response to the crisis of legitimacy facing the colonial British government in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, when many people in Hong Kong sought political

security through emigration in view of the handover of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China in 1997 (Sweeting 2004). The proportion reported in 1995 was a calculation based on an annual quota of 14,500 first-year first-degree places at UGC-funded universities in that year. This quota remained the same for nearly two decades and was increased to 15,000 in 2012 (approximately 25-30% of students of the relevant age now, varying according to the yearly total number of relevant-age students). An increase in the proportion of relevant-age students receiving a university education over the last five decades has been reflected in general statistics. In 1961 only about 4% of the population aged fifteen and above had a tertiary education (including a non-degree education); but in 2016 about 22% of the population aged fifteen and above had a degree qualification (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016).

### *Newly created routes to university*

Around year 2000, in view of a high unemployment rate, the Hong Kong SAR government sought to encourage young people to stay on in education. To this end, the government launched the community college policy and the Project Yi Jin. While the community college policy was meant to provide relevant-age students with a post-secondary qualification (i.e., an associate degree), the Project Yi Jin aimed to offer young people the minimum qualification required for doing a post-secondary qualification (i.e., five passes in HKCEE before 2012).

Before the Year 2000 education reform, there was only one route to university: through sitting the end-of-school public examination(s). In the old model of basic education mentioned at the outset, before 2012 in order to get into university, students had to sit the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) at about sixteen years of age (at the end of five-year secondary education), and then the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) at about eighteen years of age (at the end of two-year matriculation) so that they would get into a UGC-funded university through the JUPAS pathway (Joint University Programmes Admissions System). From 2012 onwards, students have to sit only one public examination at the end of basic education, because the two public examinations at the end of each of the two educational stages in the old model—HKCEE and HKALE—are replaced by the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) taken at about seventeen years of age in the new model. This change in the model of basic education, however, does not alter the fact that if students fail at their first attempt to get into university, their second chance is to re-sit the required examination(s).

But for the community college policy, respondents of this book would have re-sat HKCEE or HKALE in order to seek a second chance.

The community college policy and the Project Yi Jin, as well as some changes in higher-diploma programmes, created new routes to university because of the transfer function of an associate degree. Specifically, before 2012, two new routes were created for students who failed HKALE. The first route was to study a two-year associate-degree programme and then seek a transfer to university, thus getting into university through a non-JUPAS pathway. And the second route was to study for a higher diploma; it had been a terminal sub-degree qualification but could then bridge them to an associate-degree programme (thus subsequently to university through a transfer) and could even serve for a transfer in some cases. Meanwhile, at least three new routes were created for students who failed HKCEE. The first route was to enrol in a one-year pre-associate-degree programme that would then lead to an associate-degree programme and then a subsequent transfer. The second route was to take a higher diploma, which could immediately lead either to a transfer or to an associate-degree programme that could bring a subsequent transfer. And the third route was to join the Project Yi Jin; a successful completion of it could lead to a one-year pre-associate-degree programme, which would then lead to an associate-degree programme and a subsequent transfer. Ever since 2012, students who fail HKDSE could opt for studying for an associate degree or a higher diploma or for joining the Project Yi Jin (a successful completion of which is then an equivalence of five passes in HKDSE). Put simply, the introduction of an associate degree offers more routes to university to students who fail to get a university place through sitting the required examination(s).

### ***The option of community college as a second chance***

Community college is new to Hong Kong but sub-degree is not. Before 2000, sub-degrees, mostly offered by publicly-funded post-secondary institutions, were primarily vocationally-oriented and profession-specific higher diplomas geared towards meeting the requirements of certain industries (Education and Manpower Bureau 2008). By design, an associate degree is different from a higher diploma, in that it is not merely a terminal sub-degree qualification providing students with para-professional or vocational training, but it could serve as a bridge to a bachelor's degree for some selected talents. As such, an associate degree was initially described as a new option of getting a university place.

The idea of community college is brought to Hong Kong from the USA. The initial idea was to offer courses equivalent to the lower section (the first two years) of a four-year bachelor's degree programme at a cheaper level of tuition and to let capable students transfer to university to do the higher section (the last two years) of the programme (Beach 2011; cf. Wickersham 2020). In the USA community college is multifunctional, attempting to achieve very different—if not contradictory—goals (e.g., Dougherty 1994). On the one hand, community college offers academic courses for the ambitious who seek a transfer; on the other hand, it also offers non-academic courses to all: remedial courses for previous school dropouts, vocational courses for people who want a job, and interest courses for individuals who aim for personal development.

Despite an emphasis on the goal of transfer, some scholars argue that community college is 'cooling out' students, channelling them to taking an associate degree as a terminal qualification (e.g., Clark 1960; Brint and Karabel 1989; cf. Bailey and Morest 2006; Levin 2011). Meanwhile, other scholars counter-argue that community college could be seen as 'warming up' students, offering a chance of pursuing studies to people who would have never dreamed of returning to formal education, let alone seeking a transfer to a bachelor's degree programme (e.g., Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, and Person 2006).

In brief, community college in the USA is an inexpensive, open to all, multifunction tertiary institution (the website of American Association of Community Colleges). By contrast, community college in Hong Kong is an expensive option with certain entrance requirements taken up essentially as a second chance by relevant-age students who fail to get into university through sitting the required examination(s) but still want a bachelor's degree. The fact that community college in Hong Kong is taken up for such a particular purpose is related to the ways in which the community college policy is implemented.

The community college policy is implemented by the self-financing sector of post-secondary education. As a self-financing institution, community colleges have to rely on tuition fees to balance their finances; meanwhile, they also have great autonomy of setting and regulating their tuition fees. Indeed, because of their autonomy, community colleges in Hong Kong set very high annual tuition fees, ranging between HK\$46,000 and HK\$100,000 (US\$1=HK\$7.8) (the website of the Hong Kong Education Bureau). Some community colleges also take advantage of their autonomy to regulate their tuition fees whenever they see fit. For example, one community college charged students at HK\$50,000 for academic year 2005/06, and announced in late 2006 that it intended to increase its tuition fee to HK\$70,000 for academic year 2006/07 and to HK\$80,000 for

academic year 2007/08 (Ming Pao Daily News 8 December 2006). This community college was not challenged for making such a drastic increase in its tuition fee. Such amounts are much higher than the tuition fee of doing a first degree at a UGC-funded university, frozen at HK\$42,100 ever since academic year 1997/98. The tuition fees of community colleges were regarded as expensive; they were not, and still are not, affordable to everyone in Hong Kong when its reported median monthly household income was considered. The reported median monthly household income was about HK\$20,900 in 2006, around the time when this study was started, and was even decreased to HK\$20,200 in 2011; the latest reported figure in 2016 was about HK\$25,200 (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department 2006, 2011, 2016).

With a view to making an associate degree academically accessible, the Hong Kong SAR government encourages community colleges (and institutions offering associate-degree programmes) to adopt the principle of 'lenient entry and stringent exit' in student recruitment. Therefore, in contrast to the open access policy of the US model of community college, community colleges in Hong Kong are not open to all but are required to set some minimum entry requirements, however lenient such requirements might be.

In order to balance their finances, community colleges in Hong Kong, apart from charging high tuition fees, also rely on student recruitment. Nevertheless, given the newness and thus a lack of social recognition of an associate degree initially, it was rather difficult for community colleges to attract students. This concern about student enrolments might be a reason for some community colleges to set lax or no entry requirements. Such a practice led to a general accusation of community colleges' abusing the principle of 'lenient entry and stringent exit' for selling diplomas (e.g., Ming Pao Daily News 1 November 2007). The public were concerned about the quality of associate-degree programmes at the time (Hong Kong Federations of Students 2007). Meanwhile, in competing for prospective students, community colleges promoted, and still promote, the transfer function of an associate degree, as well as its liberal-arts orientation, as their selling point despite the policy goal that an associate degree was treated as a terminal sub-degree qualification.

Given the policy goal, the Hong Kong Education Bureau did not do much about transfers. Initially, only an extremely small number of senior-year places at UGC-funded universities were reserved for transfers. And there was no articulation between community colleges and UGC-funded universities. Even when a transfer was possible, students were at best taken in as first-year students when the annual quota of first-year first-degree places was not filled, rather than as senior-year students as promoted by

community colleges. In view of a rapid increase in the number of associate-degree graduates, the government was under great social pressure to increase the number of transfers (Education and Manpower Bureau 2006). The government then reserved 840 senior-year places at UGC-funded universities for transfers in 2005/06 and increased the number of reserved places to 1,680 from 2006/07 onwards (Education and Manpower 2008). But such a small number of senior-year places could by no means cope with the level of the demand, involving over 6,000 associate-degree graduates in 2006/07 (as shown in Table 1-3 below). In 2007, it was estimated unofficially that the transfer rate to UGC-funded programmes had been no more than 3% (e.g., Ming Pao Daily News 5 July 2007). This estimation provided an empirical basis for seeing community college as a risky option of getting a university place.

In view of its very high tuition fees, many people, perhaps understandably, did not opt for studying at community college for remedial purposes, vocational training, or personal development. It was found that nearly all community-college students were students who sought a transfer to a bachelor's degree programme, preferably offered by a UGC-funded university (Ng and Cheng 2001). In short, community college was, and still is, essentially taken up as an expensive and risky second chance of getting a place at a UGC-funded university.

In the USA some students deliberately take community college as an inexpensive alternative route to university (Cohen and Brawer 2003). By contrast, nearly all students in Hong Kong turned to community college only after failing to get into university through sitting the required public examination(s). As such, the option of community college in Hong Kong could be seen as a specific second chance. Because this specific second chance was essentially taken up by students having been failed by the education system (i.e., failing HKCEE or HKALE), community college was perceived as a second-rate institution; at least it was the case when this study was conducted. In other words, community college could be seen as enjoying a low social status within the hierarchy of higher education. Whether community college is still seen as second rate is an empirical question for further examinations. All in all, the option of community college was taken up by respondents of this book as a new, expensive, risky, and second-rate second chance.

### **An expansion of the sub-degree sector of higher education**

Given the design of the quota policy (i.e., a set annual quota of first-year first-degree places at UGC-funded universities), roughly about 70-80% of

students of the relevant age in Hong Kong are bound to fail to get a place at a UGC-funded university; but they are now encouraged to get a sub-degree qualification. This number of relevant-age students constitutes a huge market, so to speak, for sub-degree programmes (including higher-diploma programmes). Indeed, in response to the community college policy, the self-financing arms of a few UGC-funded universities took the lead in launching the first community colleges in the year of 2000, and some institutions then restructured their existing higher-diploma programmes and designed new ones.

Ever since the launch of the community college policy, the number of sub-degree programmes has been on the rise (Tang, Tsui, and Chau 2018). Table 1-1 indicates that from 2000 to 2019 the number of institutions offering sub-degree programmes increases from 4 to 29, peaking at 30 in 2012/13, and the number of sub-degree programmes increases from 38 to 278, peaking at 327 in 2014/15.

Focusing on the total number of sub-degree programmes, one would get an impression that the sub-degree sector of higher education has kept expanding until the implementation of the new model of basic education in 2012. But Table 1-1 shows further that the numbers of associate-degree and higher-diploma programmes constitute rather different trends. The number of associate-degree programmes increases drastically from 16 in 2001/02 to 128 in 2005/06, then peaks at 169 in 2009/10, and decreases gradually to fewer than 130 over the last few years. By comparison, the number of higher-diploma programmes increases more steadily from 22 in 2001/02 to 183 in 2013/14, although it decreases slowly to 151 in 2018/19.

An associate degree is taken up basically because of its transfer function. By comparison, a higher diploma is vocationally oriented, but now it could also lead to an associate degree and serve for a transfer in some cases. Given an extremely low transfer rate in the early 2010s, the public at the time considered that the option of studying for an associate degree towards the goal of transfer gave students a false hope, and that a higher diploma could be of a greater pragmatic value than an associate degree. Therefore, it was speculated that students would prefer a vocationally-oriented higher diploma to a liberal-arts-oriented associate degree. This speculation seems to be confirmed by some statistics in Table 1-1: there is a decline, albeit with fluctuations, in the number of associate-degree programmes ever since 2009/2010 but there is a steady surge in the number of higher-diploma programmes until 2014/2015.



**Table 1-1: Statistics on the full-time self-financing sector of sub-degree programmes, 2000-2019**

Academic year	Number of institutions	Number of sub-degree programmes	Number of associate-degree programmes	Number of higher-diploma programmes
2000/2001	4	---	---	---
2001/2002	11	38	16	22
2002/2003	16	77	46	31
2003/2004	20	112	74	38
2004/2005	20	173	92	81
2005/2006	20	233	128	105
2006/2007	20	261	148	113
2007/2008	22	279	158	121
2008/2009	23	289	161	128
2009/2010	23	306	169	137
2010/2011	22	315	156	159
2011/2012	26	311	157	154
2012/2013	30	315	140	175
2013/2014	28	325	142	183
2014/2015	28	327	145	182
2015/2016	29	299	124	175
2016/2017	29	299	125	174
2017/2018	29	286	125	161
2018/2019	29	278	127	151

Sources: The website of the Hong Kong Education Bureau, retrieved from [http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat\\_pg\\_index](http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat_pg_index) (consulted in 2007, 2013, and 2017), [http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat\\_gd\\_index](http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat_gd_index) (consulted in 2007, 2013, and 2017), <https://www.cspe.edu.hk/en/Statistics.page#!> (consulted in 2019)

**Table 1-2: Student enrolments in full-time self-financing sub-degree programmes, 2001-2019**

Academic year	Student enrolments in sub-degree programmes	Student enrolments in associate-degree programmes	Student enrolments in higher-diploma programmes
2001/2002	8,895	3,732	5,163
2002/2003	13,127	6,921	6,206
2003/2004	16,250	9,670	6,580
2004/2005	24,787	13,876	10,911
2005/2006	33,276	17,103	16,173
2006/2007	38,089	18,787	19,302
2007/2008	43,272	20,558	22,714
2008/2009	43,702	20,118	23,584
2009/2010	47,322	23,019	24,303
2010/2011	52,154	27,506	24,648
2011/2012	51,796	27,822	23,974
2012/2013	58,694	31,093	27,601
2013/2014	52,046	26,575	25,471
2014/2015	39,689	20,475	19,214
2015/2016	38,007	20,047	17,960
2016/2017	37,008	20,743	16,265
2017/2018	36,031	21,367	14,664
2018/2019	35,792	21,629	14,163

Sources: The website of the Hong Kong Education Bureau, retrieved from [http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat\\_el\\_index](http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat_el_index) (consulted in 2007, 2013, and 2017), [http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat\\_gd\\_index](http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat_gd_index) (consulted in 2007, 2013, and 2017), <https://www.cspe.edu.hk/en/Statistics.page#!> (consulted in 2019)

**Table 1-3: Graduates from full-time self-financing sub-degree programmes, 2001-2018**

Academic year	Number of sub-degree graduates	Number of associate-degree graduates	Number of higher-diploma graduates
2001/2002	1,068	349	719
2002/2003	2,702	1,654	1,048
2003/2004	5,443	2,949	2,494
2004/2005	6,606	3,609	2,997
2005/2006	9,335	5,763	3,572
2006/2007	10,413	6,373	4,040
2007/2008	13,531	7,159	6,372
2008/2009	14,670	7,211	7,459
2009/2010	15,400	7,303	8,097
2010/2011	15,193	8,026	7,167
2011/2012	17,137	9,468	7,669
2012/2013	19,812	10,541	9,271
2013/2014	26,655	13,035	13,620
2014/2015	17,448	9,061	8,387
2015/2016	15,945	7,962	7,983
2016/2017	15,232	8,246	6,986
2017/2018	14,842	8,460	6,382

Sources: The website of the Hong Kong Education Bureau, retrieved from [http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat\\_el\\_index](http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat_el_index) (consulted in 2007, 2013, and 2017), [http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat\\_gd\\_index](http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat_gd_index) (consulted in 2007, 2013, and 2017), <https://www.cspe.edu.hk/en/Statistics.page#!> (consulted in 2019)

However, the trends of student enrolments in associate-degree and higher-diploma programmes appear to tell a slightly different story, as Table 1-2 shows: the number of student enrolments in associate-degree or higher-diploma programmes has been on the rise from 2001/02 to 2018/19, peaking in 2012/13. Table 1-3 indicates that the same is true of the total number of graduates from either programme or from sub-degree programmes in total: the number increases from 2001/02 to 2017/18, peaking in 2013/14. Throughout these years, in some years the numbers of student enrolments in associate-degree programmes and graduates from such programmes are higher than the corresponding numbers for higher-diploma programmes, and in other years the former are lower than the latter. The statistics do not suggest any specific patterns or trends of students' preference of which sub-degree. The number of student enrolments peaking in year 2012 could be explained by the fact that in that year there were two cohorts of students (i.e., the last batch of HKALE students and the first batch of HKDSE students) simultaneously competing for a place in post-secondary education. And the number of graduates peaking in year 2013 could probably result from the peak number of student enrolments in one-year programme in 2012. All in all, Tables 1-1, 1-2, and 1-3 altogether show that the sub-degree sector of higher education, despite some fluctuations, has been expanding over the last two decades.

### **Subsequent changes in the sector of university education**

An expansion of the sub-degree sector of higher education leads to a rising number of sub-degree graduates, especially associate-degree graduates (Tang et al. 2018). Supposedly, they are all now aspiring to a bachelor's degree (Education and Manpower Bureau 2006). In view of this potential demand, and in response to continuous criticisms of the community college policy, the Hong Kong SAR government has gradually increased the number of places reserved for transfers, for first-year and senior-year intakes, over the last decade: ever since 2012, every year there are at least 5,000 transfer students (when first-year and senior-year intakes taken together) (the website of Hong Kong Education Bureau). And the target announced in 2014 was to increase the number of senior-year places alone gradually to 5,000 each year (Hong Kong Policy Address 2014). Consequently, transfer students have become a significant minority in some UGC-funded universities.

Meanwhile, such a great number of associate-degree graduates per se constitutes a new market for degree programmes. Indeed, the last few years have witnessed an increase in the number of private universities or non-UGC-funded degree-awarding institutions. At present, there are twenty-two degree-awarding institutions and nine are publicly-funded. Eight of the publicly-funded degree-awarding institutions are UGC-funded universities: City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, Lingnan University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Education University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and the University of Hong Kong (the website of the Hong Kong Education Bureau).

### ***An increasing number of new self-financing degree programmes***

Because the quota policy governs the UGC-funded sector of university education, an increasing demand for a bachelor's degree leads to an emergence of new degree programmes in the self-financing sector. Many local tertiary institutions, including new degree-awarding institutions, individually or in collaboration with overseas tertiary institutions, have designed a range of self-financing programmes or top-up programmes (self-financing programmes of a kind), full-time or part-time, targeting associate-degree holders. What should be noted is that the existing schemes of financial assistance provided by the Hong Kong SAR government for students pursuing a bachelor's degree somehow do not necessarily apply to those doing a self-financing programme.

This increasing demand for a bachelor's degree is reflected in statistics shown in Tables 1-4 and 1-5. Table 1-4 shows that the numbers of self-financing and top-up programmes increase steadily respectively from 3 in 2001/02 to 176 in 2018/19 and from 55 in 2008/09 to 315 in 2018/19. Table 1-5 indicates that the numbers of students enrolling in self-financing and top-up programmes increase during the same period, albeit with fluctuations, respectively from 268 in 2001/02 to 23,868 in 2018/19 (peaking at 24,499 in 2015/16) and from 3,342 in 2008/09 to 13,375 in 2018/19 (peaking at 15,219 in 2014/15). And Table 1-5 indicates further that the number of graduates from the self-financing sector increases from 35 in 2002/03 to 12,715 in 2017/18 (peaking at 14,212 in 2015/16).

**Table 1-4: Numbers of full-time degree programmes in the self-financing sector, 2001-2019**

<b>Academic year</b>	<b>Number of self-financing programmes</b>	<b>Number of top-up programmes</b>
2001/2002	3	NA
2002/2003	7	NA
2003/2004	11	NA
2004/2005	26	NA
2005/2006	40	NA
2006/2007	41	NA
2007/2008	52	NA
2008/2009	58	55
2009/2010	57	59
2010/2011	57	64
2011/2012	72	70
2012/2013	97	120
2013/2014	106	129
2014/2015	125	175
2015/2016	135	199
2016/2017	153	228
2017/2018	164	310
2018/2019	176	315

Sources: The website of the Hong Kong Education Bureau, retrieved from [http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat\\_pg\\_index](http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat_pg_index) (consulted in 2007, 2013, and 2017) [http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat\\_el\\_index](http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat_el_index) (consulted in 2007, 2013, and 2017), [http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat\\_gd\\_index](http://www.ipass.gov.hk/edb/index.php/ch/home/statheader/stat/stat_gd_index) (consulted in 2007, 2013, and 2017), <https://www.cspe.edu.hk/en/Statistics.page#!> (consulted in 2019)