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The Three Dilemmas of Higher Education: The 2024 Burton R. Clark Lecture[1]

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Abstract

The 2024 Burton R. Clark Lecture reviews the evolution of higher education, including three mega-trends of the last forty years (massification, neo-liberalism in higher education policy, and globalisation), the field of higher education research, the role of Burton R. Clark in the founding of that field, and the contributions of the ESRC Centre for Global Higher Education in the field in 2015-2024. It then expands on three dilemmas now confronting higher education as a whole, and the field of research. First, expectations that higher education will create greater social equality of opportunity within education, and through that weaken the determining influence of social background on career and income, are unfulfilled everywhere. Patterns of equality and mobility are affected more by remuneration in the workplace, and government tax/spend, than education. While higher education has lifted the lives of many individual students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the potential of higher education acting alone to secure aggregated redistribution has been exaggerated and the resulting disappointment is undermining social support for the sector. Second,

higher education is and always has been a process of cultural formation through immersion in knowledge. The one-sided focus of economic policy in higher education on the sector's role in the transition to work and careers ('employability'), including the use of graduate salaries as measures of the quality or performance of higher education, jeopardises the longstanding model of higher education while again creating public expectations that it is impossible to meet. Third, higher education institutions have always had a dual spatiality, combining fixed locality and national identity with the universalising claims of knowledge and the ongoing cross-border mobility of ideas and people. However, in many Euro-American jurisdictions, national government commitment to liberal internationalisation in higher education and research has collapsed amid migration resistance due to nativism, and geo-political conflict (especially the 'decoupling' of U.S.-China links in science, and the war in Ukraine) and the resulting securitisation of cross-border research. Higher education institutions and persons with a strong presence in both the national and global scales are under pressure to withdraw from or compromise their global activities to retain national support. Higher education is embedded in national law, policy and funding and this pressure can scarcely be ignored but again, the character and autonomy of the education and research core are at risk.

Keywords: Higher education research, Knowledge, Burton R. Clark, Massification, Neoliberalism in education, Employability, Globalisation, Internationalisation, Geo-politics of higher education

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The Three Dilemmas of Higher Education: The 2024 Burton R. Clark Lecture

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This Lecture covers much ground in a short time. My first departmental head, who liked studies with smaller scope, used to call the big picture approach ‘round the world for sixpence’. I trust you will tolerate it. I will review the evolution of higher education, and the emergence of higher education research as a field of inquiry, and CGHE’s contribution to that field since the centre began in 2015. Then I discuss three dilemmas confronting the field of research, and higher education as a whole. Finally, some thoughts about what is coming.

Higher education

What is higher education? We know the answer. In a world of ever-emerging difference, the core has scarcely changed in three thousand years, across every variation of time, place and culture. There was one exception but it added to the core rather than replacing it.

In the first academies in China in the Western Zhou in 1000 BCE, Buddhist monasteries in Northern India like Vikramashila and Nalanda, the Academy in Athens, the scholarly madrassas in Islamic mosques, in the medieval European universities, beginning with Bologna in 1088 CE, and the successor universities in Euro-America and across the world, the constant core of higher education has been the cultural formation of persons, in what Gert Biesta calls ‘socialisation’ and ‘subjectification’. Subjectification refers to their development as autonomous persons capable of reflexive action on their own behalf. The methods of person formation have also been largely constant. The self-forming student is immersed in knowledge, guided by teachers. Everywhere the same technologies have been used: knowledge expressed in texts, on paper and now on screen, classroom organisation, educational assessment, student selection by examination, and certification.

This intrinsic core of cultural formation has been joined to many different extrinsic purposes of higher education, from the training of state officials in China; to religious formation, scholarship and scholarly expertise in the Indian monasteries and Islamic Cordoba and Damascus; to that plus the training of lawyers and doctors in medieval Europe; to the preparation of graduates in a great range of occupations across the world today. Yet all these extrinsic purposes are achieved on the foundations of the intrinsic cultural core of learning, knowledge, teachers, texts, classes, and exams.

The different forms of higher education have another common feature: a dual spatiality. Higher education typically combines a place-bound materiality and identity, with universalising knowledge and the mobility of ideas and persons. Students and scholars have long travelled between centres of learning. Knowledge and communications flow freely. Space making beyond the nation-state is crucial to the partial autonomy of institutions.

Hence when the one big change happened in 1810, it eventually went everywhere. That was von Humboldt's plan for the University of Berlin, which added intellectual inquiry and research to the intrinsic core of learning and knowledge. This changed knowledge. Scholarship moved from received dogma to something evolving and open to scepticism. Yet higher education was still cultural formation. In fact the Humboldtian reform strengthened learning through immersion in knowledge. That reform was built into the first American research university at Johns Hopkins in 1876, and from there swept across the leading U.S. institutions. After World War II, especially after 1970, it swept across the world.

For a long time U.S. higher education was way ahead. It housed two thirds of world R&D in 1960 and achieved 50 per cent tertiary participation by 1971, compared to 15 per cent in UK. And in the 1960s and 1970s three U.S. scholars at the University of California developed a new way of thinking about higher education: Clark Kerr, Martin Trow and Bob Clark.

Higher education research: The University of California legacy

Clark Kerr wrote as a university president absorbed by the inner dynamics of large comprehensive research universities. His 'multiversity' emphasised *multiplicity*, diverse purposes, norms, visions, interests, groups, stakeholders, agendas. Martin Trow was a sociologist who situated higher education in larger social evolution. His *Problems in the transition from elite to mass higher education* explained how massification differentiated higher education into three kinds of education: selective elite formation, middle level mass occupational preparation, universal participation. He rejected the idea that growth in higher education was shaped by economic demand for skills. It was driven by social demand for opportunity and betterment, and there was no end to expansion. That proved to be right.

Bob Clark was a sociologist of the university as an organisation. He was fascinated by the intersection between the intrinsic learning and research core and institutional power, and examined it cross-culturally, studying Europe, Japan and the Soviet Union. In 1983 his influential book *The higher education system* described a collegial higher education world of predominantly bottom-up elements, flatness, ambiguity, looseness and disorder in work organisation and governance. Higher education was changing, and Clark noted the growth of state power and professional administration, but these were subordinate themes. His famous triangle positioned the 'academic oligarchy' as one of the three modes of national system coordination and described market coordination as bottom up and the opposite of top-down state coordination. A decade later the neoliberal revolution had arrived, governments were using managed market competition as an instrument of rule, and inside institutions the academic oligarchy was giving ground to the university executive.

Table 1. The field of higher education research, with examples

PURPOSES / LENS/ UNIT	INTRINSIC STUDENT LEARNING	INTRINSIC RESEARCH & INQUIRY	EXTRINSIC SOCIETY BUILDING	EXTRINSIC WORLD BUILDING
LOCAL CLASSROOM / DISCIPLINE	teaching and learning	disciplinary research	citizenship education	global citizenship
LOCAL INSTITUTION can be a purpose in itself	student engagement	research in higher educ	impact on community	university ranking
NATIONAL SYSTEM can be a purpose in itself	assessment systems	research and innovation	education and GDP, equality	peace education
INTERNAT'L COMPARISON	(learning achievement)	research performance	rates of return to degrees	international'n indicators
GLOBAL	digital learning, cross-cultural	global science, bilbliometrics	cross-border mobility	planetary education

HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH
(WITH EXAMPLES)

However, the main contribution of Kerr, Trow and Clark was this. They created higher education research. They saw higher education as a distinctive domain for inquiry with dynamics that cannot be *exhaustively* explained using theories and methods developed for other fields. This is the key insight into reality. Higher education has its own dynamics. We are still discovering those dynamics, while fending off policy constructs that don't understand the sector. As Clark said: 'It does not make much sense to evaluate business firms according to how much they are like universities, nor economic systems according to their resemblances to higher education systems. Neither does it make any sense to do the reverse'.[2] Of the features specific to higher education Clark emphasised *knowledge*: ever a mystery, central to university organisation, shaping identity and behaviour, endemically incomplete, the driver of continuing diversity.

Mapping the field

Let's pause the story for a moment to reflect on the field of higher education research (Table 1) enabled by Kerr, Trow and Clark. Higher education research is not a discipline. It is multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary. It is a field of

[2] Clark, B. (1983). *The higher education system*. University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 275.

inquiry with a primarily applied bent, like public health. Much is instrumental and unpublished, executed for institutions, governments and companies. Yet higher education matters, it excites curiosity and calls up theorisation. New concepts, findings and explanations feed back into applied research and practice. As in all social science there is an endemic lack of effective connection between research and practice. It needs astute operators at both ends of the relation, who understand each other. Timing is crucial to impact in government. You must be there when someone is asking, and listening. When no-one is listening, it is difficult. You wait for government to change.

The examples in the slide are just examples, not the sum of all possible research in the box. There are differing units of observation and analysis. The local student or classroom, the institution, and the national system, are the units used most often. International comparisons are widely employed. A few of us treat the world, also, as a unit of analysis.

Of course, much research is focused on the local institution as an end in itself – for example its comparative performance or bottom line. The national higher education system is another end in itself, for example in work on system design, efficiency and financing.

How higher education has been changed

Now let's return to the story. We are now in the 32 years between *The Higher Education System* and the opening of CGHE. Clark's work was followed by three great transformations affecting higher education: the social transformation that is massification, the policy transformation that is neo-liberalism, and the ontological transformation of globalisation.

Massification. Since the mid 1970s the 3,000-year old model of cultural formation has been radically scaled up, in nearly all high-income and middle-income and some low-income countries. The world Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio has risen from 11 per cent in 1975 to 42 per cent in 2022, remaking system design, delivery, governance, management and financing.

Neo-liberal regulation emerged in the Anglophone 1980s to foster capital accumulation in and through public activities like higher education. Institutions

were re-imagined, from producers of multiple public and private goods to competitive money-making businesses. Education and research were re-imagined as commodities subject to performance management. The student was re-imagined from a self-forming learning subject immersed in knowledge, to a consumer in a market, purchasing future earnings from institutions.

Accelerated ***economic and cultural globalisation*** at the end of the Cold War took place under conditions of U.S. global hegemony in politics, economy, science, culture and education. Trade barriers came down and supply chains flourished. Global integration was quickened by networked communications after the Internet began in 1989. Higher education and knowledge were culturally globalised without full integration into the capitalist economy. Nevertheless, 1990s globalisation coincided with neo-liberalism, establishing the policy primacy of economics in higher education, the myth of the global knowledge economy, the commercial market in student mobility, and the worldwide order of university rankings.

For more than 25 years states were liberal capitalist supporters of internationalisation in higher education and science. Anglophone states wanted to expand Anglophone cultural influence in missionary fashion, with the spread of English and integration of non-Western countries into Euro-American cultural norms. Student mobility would encourage trade and cosmopolitan cultural inclusion would optimise market reach. We now know the support of states for liberal capitalist internationalisation was of its time, not a permanent condition, but it facilitated a great flourishing of cross-border higher education. The networked global science system grew by 5 per cent a year and cross-border collaboration peaked at 23 per cent of science papers in 2020. Cross-border student mobility rose from 1.9 million in 1998 to 6.4 million in 2021, with two students in five paying commercial fees. The same year 22 per cent of doctoral students in OECD countries crossed borders for study.

Anglophone style education and science became globally distributed, though on a plural not homogenous basis, without integrating non-Western countries into the U.S. hegemony. Between 2003 and 2022, science papers from China multiplied by ten, from 89,000 to 899,000. In the 2023 Leiden ranking of high citation papers China had ten of the top 14 universities in physical sciences and

engineering, and the top nine in mathematics and computing. Tsinghua was world top STEM university, passing MIT. Science was also growing quickly in non-Western middle powers like India, South Korea, Brazil, Turkey and Iran.

The result is a global contradiction, a deep tension between the spread of post-colonial university capacity and the continued colonial models of institution and the organisation of knowledge. Journals, bibliometrics and Times Higher and QS are still patterned by the 1990 U.S. cultural hegemony. English is the only language of universal global science. Rankings are grounded in the ideal Anglophone science university. The vast bulk of human knowledge is excluded as merely local knowledge. 'Internationalisation' in higher education in many countries is invasive Western internationalisation and a crisis of purpose and identity. At first sight world higher education seems to be more Americanised than in the time of Kerr, Trow and Clark, but in reality it is a different world, one moving rapidly towards somewhere else.

CGHE research projects

How has CGHE responded to these transformations? CGHE has worked across a wider range of topics than other research centres on higher education, with multiple responses to neo-liberalism and globalisation. No CGHE project directly addresses massification, though the history project 7 traces its trajectory in France and England.

Project 1 on student learning, project 5 on the graduate loan burden and project 8 on the public good contributions of higher education focus on humanist domains suppressed by the student-as-consumer discourse. Project 3's research on research moves well beyond a solely economic framing of knowledge. Project 4 on the graduate labour market investigates not so called 'low value course' but graduate jobs, and labour market equity. Project 6 on governance unpicks corporatised universities. Projects 8, 9 and 10 in different ways map the global space and global relations. Project 2 brings online MOOCs into the global South.

Table 2. Centre for Global Higher Education research projects

Project and lead researcher
1 Graduate experiences of employment and knowledge (Ashwin)
2 Realising the potential of technology for scaling up higher education (Laurillard)
3 The research function and mission of higher education (Oancea)
4 Graduate labour market and equity (Henseke)
5 Student loan debt and graduate decision making (Callender)
6 The impact of locality and region on university governance (Shattock)
7 Historical lens on higher education staffing: UK and France (Carpentier)
8 Local and global public good of higher education in ten nations (Marginson)
9 Supra-national higher education space (McCowan, Brooks, Chankseliani, Mills)
10 UK international graduates in East Asia (Mok)
A Funding reform, participation and equity in England (Dearden)
B Industry-university research collaboration in UK (Tijssen)
C Sustainable income contingent student loans (Chapman, Dearden)
D Private provision in UK and its relations with the mainstream (Parry/Boliver)
E The academic workforce in the UK (Locke/Whitchurch)
F The effects of Brexit in UK higher education (Marginson)

CGHE RESEARCH PROJECTS

Note: Project leaders only are listed here. Nearly all projects have multiple CGHE researchers. The project numbers 1-10 are used in the current iteration of CGHE, the centre transition phase (2020-2024). Six of the projects in the first phase of CGHE (2015-2020) did not carry over to the transition centre.

Table 3. CGHE projects positioned in the field of higher education research

PURPOSES / LENS/ UNIT	INTRINSIC STUDENT LEARNING	INTRINSIC RESEARCH & INQUIRY	EXTRINSIC SOCIETY BUILDING	EXTRINSIC WORLD BUILDING
LOCAL CLASSROOM / DISCIPLINE	1 Learning Ashwin 2 Digital Laurillard *HE as self-formation*	3 Research Oancea		
LOCAL INSTITUTION 6 Governance E Academic labour	F Brexit effects	3 Research Oancea F Brexit effects	6 Governance Shattock B Industry links	F Brexit effects *University rankings*
NATIONAL SYSTEM 6 Governance C ICL D Private E Academic labour	2 Digital Laurillard	3 Research Oancea	4 Work Henseke 5 Debt Callender 6 Governance Shattock 7 History Carpentier 8 Public good *HPS CHE* A Funding C ICL	
INTERNAT'L COMPARISON	1 Learning Ashwin	3 Research Oancea	4 Work Henseke (5 Debt Callender) 6 Governance Shattock 7 History Carpentier 8 Public good *HPS*	8 Public good Marginson 9 Supra-national McCowan et al
GLOBAL	2 Digital Laurillard 10 Mok East Asian graduates	*Global science*	8 Public good Marginson 10 Mok East Asia *Contributions of HE*	9 Supra-national McCowan et al *Globalisation in HE* *Geo-politics of HE*

CGHE RESEARCH IN THE FIELD
[+FURTHER PI WORK]

Note: Project leaders only are listed here. Nearly all projects have multiple CGHE researchers. The project numbers 1-10 are used in the current iteration of CGHE, the centre transition phase (2020-2024). Six of the projects in the first phase of CGHE (2015-2020) did not carry over to the transition centre.
HPS = High participation systems
CHE = Contributions of higher education

The table positions ten current and six former CGHE projects in the field. Placement is often ambiguous and arbitrary. Some will question it. There is more information about projects on the CGHE website and you will soon hear from the project leaders.

The slide adds my own additional research and conceptual inquiries into higher education, individual and joint, during the lifetime of CGHE.

Most CGHE projects work on *either* an intrinsic or an extrinsic aspect of higher education, in several geographic scales. Multiple spatial lenses are a strength of CGHE. Systematic international comparisons are used in half the projects. Note the concentration of work using the national system lens for 'extrinsic society building'. This reflects the close interest of CGHE researchers, and its funders – ESRC and originally, HEFCE – in contributions to national policy, including data on graduate employment, the effects of loan debt, governance, the public good function of institutions, tuition loans systems, the private sector. There are less projects in the intrinsic core, but they have weighty agendas, including project 1 on student learning and 3 on research. Few CGHE projects use the institutional lens, in contrast with the field - there is no work on university management or finances – but the governance project, which uses an institutional lens, has been very productive.

CGHE researchers criticise the mainstream and contribute to it, typical of social science, like Habermas's public sphere: chronically unsatisified with the state, connecting with data and constructive ideas, dreaming a bit. CGHE generates knowledge and its work is used.

Yet the world has changed further since most of the CGHE projects were conceived. The future of higher education is more fragile and contested. Three deep-seated dilemmas are now apparent.

The three dilemmas of higher education

We proclaim that higher education has never been so important. Yet its position is not 'strong and stable'. The UK government treats it as a whipping horse with little pushback outside the sector, and no concern about the plunging unit of resource. Higher education is stronger in Nordic Europe and especially in East Asia, which might be its bastion in future. But it seems brittle in many places. Violations of autonomy and academic freedom multiply – government interventions in curricula, research cooperation and student mobility. If Trump

wins, what's happened in Florida will spread across the U.S. and science will be in trouble.

The political flak is a symptom of deeper problems that have evolved out of massification, neo-liberalism and globalisation. Left unaddressed, these problems have festered.

Is equality of opportunity impossible?

The first dilemma is this: Is equality of opportunity impossible? Sixty years ago schooling and higher education were positioned by education researchers and policy makers as sectors that could transform society into an egalitarian meritocracy. The ideal was the equal distribution, across all social categories, of participation, student achievement, educational outcomes *and* graduate careers, so that education would function as the great articulator and redistributor, and people's starting positions would no longer determine their lives. That mission soaked into social science and in some form has shaped popular understandings everywhere. All societies expect progress on equal opportunity, social mobility and equity, though many also tolerate high institutional stratification. But we must face the fact that the long struggle to lift social equality of opportunity through education has failed, in all countries, whether high capitalist, social democratic and socialist. While we bring great benefits to many individuals, including those who are first in their families in higher education, we now know that our work alone cannot remake the social aggregates. Reform of higher education alone is never sufficient to drive social equalisation, and massification has made this harder to achieve.

The failure of equality of opportunity is readily understood in countries with high stratification, or financial barriers, or discrimination, or where families invest privately to improve their odds, as with independent schooling in the U.K. The competitive structures fostered by neo-liberal reform have also favoured families best equipped to compete. But the failure to advance social equality through education is apparent also in Nordic countries where systems are less stratified, there is free access to institutions of high quality, and a social consensus about equality and solidarity. Nordic states work hard on equality in education but have been unable to leverage that to secure greater overall

equality in society, though they have been able to hold the line. Nordic family background continues to govern access to high demand law and medicine and shape unequal outcomes at work.

The problem is exacerbated by a secular trend associated with massification. Expansion of participation improves equity as inclusion, which is certainly worthwhile, but not distributive equity in social outcomes. All else being equal, as total participation expands, student numbers in elite universities expand at a slower than average rate, increasing scarcity, and stretching the vertical calibration of degree power. Raising the stakes and narrowing the gate intensifies competition for places at the top, and that inexorably favours middle-class families best equipped to win. As Trow noted fifty years ago, and has been repeatedly confirmed empirically, newly participating families enter the less prestigious institutions, limiting the scope to foster equality while preserving the character of elite universities.

Vikki Boliver states that: 'Our fundamental mistake is to believe that greater social mobility is the desired goal and that increased equality of opportunity is the way to achieve it. In reality, neither is possible without greater equality of condition. In a more equal society, not only would it be easier for those from relatively disadvantaged family backgrounds to get to university and to experience higher education to the full, it would also matter much less for any given individual's future socioeconomic prospects whether they went to university or not.'[3]

Yet society still widely believes that higher education, not social background or *guanxi*, determines career outcomes; that we should be judged by the extent of the social mobility achieved; and no institution should be unrepresentative of society. This bar is too high. We have oversold our capacity to deliver mobility and justice through our own practices alone. Disappointed expectations undermine public support for higher education, which at any moment can flip over into perceptions of higher education as a conspiracy of the elite. Then disappointed expectations merge with the resentments of those excluded altogether. Segmentation between people with and without higher education is

[3] Boliver, V. (2017), Misplaced optimism: How higher education reproduces rather than reduces social inequality. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 38 (3), p. 432

readily mobilised in populist political campaigns. Now that participation has expanded to half of the population but not everyone, *the stratification and exclusion effects of higher education are more visible on a large scale* than either its contribution to the earning power of graduates, which tends to fall on average as massification advances, or its potentials to lift opportunity and mobility.

So that is the first dilemma. Longstanding, a trap partly of our own making, and becoming more difficult as massification has advanced. What can be done? First, we continue to strive for practical equality at every stage, or higher education becomes *more* socially unequal, blighting lives and emptying out its popular legitimacy, as is happening in the U.S. Second, we scale back expectations by shifting the attention of research to sectors that more directly determine social equality – such as wages and pay scales, and government tax and spend.

Is higher education cultural or economic?

The second dilemma is this: Is higher education cultural or economic? There is no doubt about the core of higher education, as I explained at the beginning of the Lecture. Cultural formation through immersion in knowledge has long sustained the broad development of students, as individuals and in social relations, with highpoints in Confucian self-cultivation and the *Bildung* idea. Cultural formation has been annexed in a flexible manner to many extrinsic purposes. Where the programme has been vocational, the same methods of cultural formation have been used. Without changing purpose or methods the intrinsic core is very adaptable. Higher education and knowledge have a chameleon like quality, one clue to the continuance of the university form. But there are limits to this.

Cultural formation enables the multiplicity that Clark Kerr discussed. Studies repeatedly show that students have multiple objectives. They want personal growth and experience, *and* immersion in disciplinary knowledge, *and* graduate jobs. It's not either/or. But the objectives are still distinct. Higher education is more like schooling than like work. Agentic positioning, goals, values, knowledges, skills, and required behaviours are different. The best training in

skills and employability is in the job. Seeing the heterogeneity of higher education and work is the first step to improving the transitions and combinations between them.

Intrinsic learning in higher education is foundational to graduate work. It augments student agency and provides specific knowledges and pre-vocational skills that underpin on the job learning. Direct vocational preparation in work experience or internship, and job-search skills, are add-ons to intrinsic learning. Even in many occupational courses, transition to the workplace is challenging and takes time. Higher education and work are loosely coupled. The relation between higher education and work is not a linear flow. To press education and work into one process – either by treating them as essentially the same, or subordinating one to the other - is to violate either work or higher education. No prizes for guessing which.

However, the pure human capital vision, education focused solely on productivity and employability, now dominates policy and public debate in many countries, concerned about graduate under-employment. The focus on narrow employability carries moral authority. The right to work is widely felt, as it should be. So governments more confidently press for the remaking of higher education by pushing the sphere of work back into education and measuring education in vocational economic terms, installing extrinsic job preparation *inside* the intrinsic core of higher education, as with the TEF salary data. This is a second trap.

The bottom line is that neo-liberal policy does not see higher education as personal formation in knowledge as optimal for productivity and growth. If government set out today to design a higher education system focused on employable graduates, it would not use cultural formation, knowledge organised in academic disciplines, and the teaching/research nexus. I think it is only a matter of time before a new model of ‘job-ready’ education is proposed that unwinds the cultural core. Promising greater efficiency and job security and radically stripping back autonomous self-formation in knowledge, deconstructing the foundations of university organisation and academic work.

So that is the second dilemma. It arose in the last decade or so as neo-liberal policy obtained a greater hold, but higher education is partly complicit. What can be done? It is not enough to respond by saying, not culture versus economics, culture *and* economics. Matters have gone too far. The singular economic framework is rapidly marginalising cultural formation. We need to make the case for cultural formation. This means coming out hard and publicly in support of the role of knowledge and the benefits of student engagement in it, as Paul Ashwin does. If *we* don't advocate knowledge and cultural formation, and the shared empowerment and democratic agency they bring, no one else will. We should also advocate research like that of CGHE project 1 into the formative effects of knowledge.

Is higher education national or global?

The third dilemma is this: Is higher education national or global? Until 2018 or thereabout many people in higher education rightly said 'both'. However, there is now pressure on institutions and persons in Euro-America to choose, to maintain their position in the national scale, where higher education is housed and funded, by disavowing the global. This weakens learning, research and the autonomy of the sector.

Globalisation has enabled the sector to explore its dual spatiality and mobility in many ways. Millions of people have used cross-border mobility to create possibilities and build their individual agency. Global science evolved as a bottom-up network outside national control. Governments could alter the participation of 'their' institutions, with difficulty, but not the network itself. Nor could they lock out global science, which is an essential resource for governments and industry. Anglophone institutions expanded their strategic freedoms in cross-border partnerships, university consortia, offshore branches, and online education which like communication between scientists could not be nationally regulated.

Whole systems combined action in the national and global scales to enhance outcomes in both. The U.S. used a relaively open border to draw global talent into its universities. The UK and Australia worked the market in cross-border education to build resources, deepening research capacity and thereby

enhancing global reputation, a virtuous circle that rotated through the scales. China pursued a national/global synergy, supported by growing state investment, with spectacular results. International collaboration, especially into the U.S., helped build national infrastructure while taking China-based researchers to the cutting edge. State funding drew back diasporic scientists. Compared to the Anglophone nations there is less outreach and more national capacity building but China leads the world in STEM. Again, global and national actions strengthened the other in a circular process.

University leaders and scientists understood the global as a distinctive zone of activity. So do mobile students, and educators working to form global citizens. However, governments see cross-border activity through the lens of methodological nationalism, the belief that national state and society are the natural form of the world. When internationalisation is seen merely as a national arms race in innovation, the distinctive global space becomes marginalised and global phenomena are seen solely as outgrowths of nations and determined by them.

As long as Pax Americana allowed Euro-American states to focus on economic goals rather than national order and security, and states and economic elites drew material benefits from globalisation, they were in-principle supporters of liberal capitalist internationalisation, and higher education as free to practice the national and global at the same time. This began to change about 2010. The growth of world trade and offshoring slowed and supply chains shortened. By the mid 2010s nation-bound thinking, economic protectionism, nativism and opposition to migration were all increasing. In 2016 Brexit and Trump rammed the point home. At the same time the rise of China and other non-Western powers was weakening U.S. global hegemony. This fostered disillusionment in the U.S. with liberal openness, and fed popular anxieties about loss of status across the Euro-American world. There was no evident decline in the momentum of globalisation in higher education. However, a fault line between national polities and globally engaged universities had opened up. It was just a matter of time before global links in higher education were problematised by policy.

By the early 2020s this was apparent across Euro-America. Dutch and Danish politicians wanted to cap incoming students. In 2023 UK, Canada and Australia all announced new limitations on student mobility, forgoing part of the revenue, offering various pretexts but in fact responding to migration sensitivity. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, which forced the mobility of many Ukrainian faculty and students, also isolated Russian universities from all global dealings. The Putin regime routinely labels its critics as 'foreign agents'.

The most significant regression has been the U.S. decoupling from China in global science. The U.S.-China relation is the largest collaborative pairing in the science system. In 2018 the Trump government's China Initiative, with bipartisan support, empowered federal authorities to investigate joint China-U.S. appointments and projects. Researchers with Chinese backgrounds were stigmatised. A survey by Jenny Lee found that 20 per cent of U.S. scientists of Chinese descent, and 12 per cent of other scientists, broke ties in China after the China Initiative. Visas for Chinese doctoral students in some fields are restricted, and U.S. university leaders discouraged from visiting China. The number of joint U.S.-China research papers is now falling. The U.S. pressures other Western governments to follow. Though few research ties are in sensitive domains, states are regulating China linkages on the basis of blanket securitisation. Higher education is meant to fall into line. For its part China continues to keep all borders open, though its rhetoric is more nationally strident than before.

The shared global space crucial to higher education is being diminished. In the Anglosphere the old imperial perspective, methodological globalism with a U.S. national centre, is fading, replaced by pure methodological nationalism and the projects of the nation and its allies, in a Hobbesian world seen as irretrievably divided and hostile. Given that the agentic mobility of persons and knowledge is foundational to the freedom and identity of higher education, violations engendered by geopolitics and single-scale nationalism do not bode well. The spreading securitisation of research places in jeopardy the collective science system, the combined repository of knowledge, which is crucial to addressing the Climate-Nature Emergency. This threat to dual spatiality is a second existential crisis for higher education.

So that is the third dilemma. It was not a dilemma until recently, when the political context changed and we had to choose. What can be done? Institutions must defy methodological nationalism and maintain plural geographical scales, finding new ways to remain global by operating separately from the states that fund and regulate them. That requires courage.

Emerging challenges

I have talked about three dilemmas that prolematise the future of higher education. Perhaps if we were starting CGHE today we would focus also on the future of a troubled world.

First, we need to lift social justice and equality beyond the national and into the global. We have no framework for global justice and equality in education and knowledge. In the global scale rights of equality are also rights of diversity. If we are to progress a stable global based on multi-polarity without a hegemon, it will be an order grounded in he er butong, unity in diversity, like the EU. We can move this order forward in higher education and knowledge, ahead of states. We must press the major publishers and the bibliometric systems to incorporate knowledge in all languages in a multi-lingual; publishing and translation regime.

Second, politics. In almost every Euro-American country, and some others, politics is nervous, faltering, destabilised by the anxiety and lost future of the climate-nature emergency, within the power vacuum created in the transition from US hegemony to a multi-polar world. Nation-states must co-exist without a global policeman and national polities need consensus. Failure means we slide into war. Higher education is where students are prepared in social relations and formed as reflexive persons capable of social action. One way forward to more stable political systems, based on distributed agency, is education.

Finally, the big one, the Climate-Nature Emergency. Economies grounded in Anglophone liberal capital accumulation cannot solve this and are most emphatically part of the problem. Despite its traumas the state is the only feasible point of coordination. Though states will need to become better at

devolving responsibilities to the local level. At the CGHE conference in ten years we might be discussing the transformation of higher education to contribute to state-led mitigation, disaster relief and the reconstruction of social systems.