

# Academic Capitalism and Its Influence on Universities in the United States

アカデミック・キャピタリズムとアメリカの大学への影響

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## 要 旨

この論文では、アメリカの大学の人文、社会学の分野の教授がどのようにアカデミック・キャピタリズムを認識しているのか、インタビューを通して分析する。アカデミック・キャピタルは大学の外部からお金と名声をもたらすもので、教育の現場では教える内容がなぜ重要なのかという丁寧な説明や、教えること自体にたいしての評価が一般的に行われている。インタビューした人文、社会学の教授たちは、アカデミック・キャピタリズムの影響が教育の現場に及んでいることを認めながら、自分たちの信じる教育の根本的な原理にこだわって、日々の研究や教育に従事している姿が浮かび上がってくる。

## Introduction

When I studied as a doctoral student in the United States, I thought that there was an active academic community where professors and graduate students discussed many kinds of topics and issues. In the academic community, many ideas are shared among participants, and accumulated academic capital consisting of useful knowledge benefits students, educators, and researchers. I was very interested in the nature of academic capital at that time.

In addition, while I was a teaching assistant at a university in the United States, a

professor asked me to compile a list of books on racial issues in education. As I did for my research paper, I went to a university library and entered relevant keywords in the library database, and found many books on the topic. I made a list of the books and submitted it to the professor. However, the professor was not quite satisfied with the list because the list did not include highly acclaimed books on the topic. The professor knew many well-known scholars in the field and the publication companies that published high-quality scholarly books, and he indicated that I should have been more careful about the quality of the books on the list. From this incident I became keenly aware that the professor had rich academic capital.

In this paper I will attempt to analyze how professors understand academic capital, how academic capitalism has influenced professors in the humanities and social sciences and how they perceive knowledge production in their fields.

### **Rise of Academic Capitalism**

In the 1980s research universities in the U.S. shifted themselves to become more market-oriented because of several events that affected them. In particular, Renault (2006) mentioned four events: less funding from the federal government to universities, the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980, the advancement of biotechnology, and the Supreme Court decision in *Diamond v. Chakrabarty* in 1980. The Bayh-Dole Act was passed to advance the use of inventions resulting from research activities funded by the federal government and to promote the commercial use and public dissemination of invented products. Because of this act, small business companies and universities were able to retain intellectual property rights to their inventions generated by federally funded research. *Diamond v. Chakrabarty* was the Supreme Court decision that enabled a company and a university to patent human-made microorganisms, which has resulted in an increasing number of biotech patent and spin-off business activities. As a result of these events many research universities in the U.S. formalized the process in which technological inventions could be transferred to profitable businesses.

The corporatization of higher education in the United States and in other countries has created several issues that university administrators and professors have had to ponder. One is the missions of universities. It is believed that universities serve the public good and maximize public benefits. However, as more external funds are made available for research activities, administrators and professors cannot ignore the demands and needs of the organizations that provided the research funds. In other words, conflicts of interest between the university and external organizations have emerged. Newson (1998) states that corporatization of universities could transform the

universities in two distinctive ways. One aspect is that a contract between a business company and a university enables the company to exercise influence on university programs and research activities for the company's benefit. Therefore, the mission of the program could be distorted. The second aspect is that on a larger scale the modus operandi of universities is heavily influenced and governed by the business sector, and in an extreme case universities themselves become undistinguishable from business corporations. These are the concerns that Newson mentions.

Newson also argues that corporatization of universities can significantly transform the university's *raison d'être* of the university, from an educational institution generating new knowledge for the public good to a market-oriented institution that privatizes advanced knowledge that only serves a certain sector of society. In other words, universities adapt themselves to federal government policies and external contingencies that support them financially, undermining the noble educational missions.

It is undeniable that universities have dual economic roles, producing revenues for educational and research activities and maximizing wealth in the society where the universities are located in a globally competitive world. To achieve the dual roles efficiently, Rhoades (2005) argues that the governing body of a university should create a new mechanism to broaden shared governance accountable to a wide range of interests and contingencies. Universities are now under the heavy influence of academic capitalism, which proposes market rules on the educational sphere, and professors and administrators should have business consciousness in managing administrative, educational, and research activities. However, there has been resistance to the influence of academic capitalism. For instance, Bowen (2005) claims that university administrators should be independent of external pressures because the academy knows best how to educate civil citizens and to promote democratic society. Furthermore, Nussbaum (2010) claims that teaching literature and the arts are essential in educating young people with a good understanding of the world and creating a democratic society.

In *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy*, Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) examine how the faculty who were involved in the process of transferring technologies to the market thought about patenting their research activities. The authors discovered that the faculty had conflicts in handling new knowledge. On one hand, new knowledge should be disseminated for the public because the faculty is supposed to serve the public good. On the other hand, research is funded by an external contingency and new knowledge should be kept secret only to benefit the contingency that provided the money. To put it differently, professors have to make a decision as to whether new knowledge should be published or patented. The faculties whom they interviewed are inclined to shift their attitude toward a more academic capitalist knowledge regime,

even though they think that publications are more important than patenting.

Universities have become more involved in market activity, and this growing activity is called academic capitalism (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997). Academic capitalism refers to all sorts of activities within a university to attract external revenue for a department, a program, or an individual professor. Academic capitalism is directly engaged in for-profit market activity through patents, licenses and spin-off firms. In addition, it shows the attitudes toward seeking grants, research funds, and contributions outside the university. In both cases, academic capitalism supports market-oriented activities and competitiveness typical of the global market.

Two different views exist on the effect of academic capitalism. One is that external pressures created by academic capitalism transform the way in which professors think about themselves, their students, and their educational and research activities. From this point, it is argued that market-driven value is the only significant value on which professors rely, and the roles of professors, students and on a larger scale, universities, are homogenized. In other words, academic capitalism promotes uniformity among professors, resulting in homogeneity of educational and research activities. The other view is more moderate than the aforementioned view. Disciplinary differences and diversity within a university are driving forces to enrich education and research, and many humanistic fields are immune to the influence of academic capitalism. This means that academic capitalism does not have a uniform impact on a university. Rather, it shows a variety of manifestations among different academic disciplines and individual professors, thereby not distorting the academic culture that puts importance on diversity.

Ylijoki (2003) claims that among professors in Finland that he interviewed, seeking external funds is an everyday reality, and that they are very active in looking for new sources of income outside the university. However, he also states that the impact of academic capitalism varies among academic departments. He says that “technological fields and humanities are situated at opposite ends of ‘the funding map’ while social science holds a sort of middle position” (329). On the whole, it is premature to claim that academic capitalism generates a unified culture where market orientation is the norm across disciplines and destroy the unique traditions of academic departments.

In science and technology departments, academic capitalism causes professors to view their students as contributors of generating new knowledge that can be turn into a commodity (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). However, the students’ right to have access to the new knowledge is limited, and because the professors supervise and sponsor the process of generating the new knowledge, they usually claim intellectual property rights for it.

## **Data Collection**

I received research funds from Aichi University in 2009–2010, and took a trip to the United States and interviewed three American professors there. In addition, I also traveled to the United States another time, and interviewed three American professors. Furthermore, I interviewed one Asian professor who was a visiting professor in Tokyo who belongs to a university in the U.S.

This study is based on interviews with seven professors teaching at U.S. universities. Sarah teaches philosophy of education, philosophy of social science, and moral philosophy at Snow University, which is a prestigious private university. She has been teaching at Snow University for more than twenty years. Melissa is a colleague of Sarah and she teaches qualitative research methods, popular culture and education. She has also been teaching at Snow University almost as long as Sarah. Jennifer is a professor at College of Education at Island University, which is a flagship state university. She has been teaching in Korea for a couple of years before taking a teaching position at Island University. Michael is a colleague of Jennifer and he teaches philosophy of education, particularly John Dewey. Kyle is also teaching philosophy of education at Island University, and Kyle received a Ph.D. from the university where Sarah did her Ph.D. In fact, Kyle and Sarah were classmates when they were doctoral students. Julia teaches American studies at Island University. She did her undergraduate study in Japan and earned her Ph.D. in the United States. Kathryn is a professor at Urban University, which is a well-known public university, and teaches continental philosophy, feminism, and Latin American philosophy.

I conducted a semi-structural interview in English for one hour or sometimes one hour and a half each time. I asked each of them how long they had been teaching at college, how American universities had changed since they took a teaching position at college, and what principles were foundations for the development of American universities. Moreover, I asked them what was the relationship between their scholarship and teaching in their case and how they saw the knowledge they taught. In fact, I asked them several questions and tried to draw their thoughts on academic capital, the current state of American universities, and knowledge production in the academy.

## **Academic Capital**

Sarah defines academic capital as “the currency that gives you stature and is predominantly the stuff which is in some way or other generates either money or prestige.” She goes on saying that money means the tuitions students who pay, charitable

contributions alumni are willing to pay, and funds from government and educational foundations. To attract these resources, a university has to have prestige. Prestige stems from academic reputation attached to high quality research and teaching of professors who generate theoretical, empirical, and normative inquiries. In other words, good quality research and teaching result in visible recognition of a university inside and outside academia.

Melissa claims that naming experience is crucial as part of academic capital students earn. When students experience some sort of discrimination, they feel pain and depression. However, their pain and depression cannot be acknowledged properly and relieved unless their experiences are put into words. She says:

Many of our students come in with a deep kind of knowledge about the experience of discrimination. But they do not have a current vocabulary to talk about it. So I feel that one of the things that we do in this department is to give people the opportunity to learn vocabulary that other people also use to talk about the issues they care about. And we give them choices so that they can make the vocabulary theirs.

I think that it is very important to gain the vocabulary that students use to frame their experiences, and that explicitly talking about their experiences with socially appropriate words empowers the students. So I think that framing experiences that previously had no words is part of academic capital that students can earn when they have good quality education.

### **Accountability**

Many of the interviewees think that the culture of the university has been changed over the past twenty years. Michael thinks that the culture of measurement and of accountability has been prevalent. Julia also states that there has been more emphasis on teaching assessments. She says, “Both administrators and the government want quantitative data as to what the students are learning.” Island University is supported by the state government, and its colleges and departments are well aware of the demands from the state government. Julia says that her college’s American studies department has come up with its own way of measuring students’ academic achievement. One professor is designated to be in charge of a student and that professor compiles the student’s papers, exams and other relevant materials and keeps track of his or her academic progress. Assessment has become an important part of a professor’s job.

Melissa says that the rise of professionalism has become conspicuous in the past twenty years. Professional schools, such as public administration schools and business

schools, have gained more public recognition than before. Sarah also says, “My sense is that students and universities have become somewhat more pragmatic in emphasizing professional fields and particularly at a place like Snow University where I think there’s a real feeling that the strength of Snow University, for the most part, lies in its professional programs.” To study in one of the professional schools at Snow University, students pay a lot of money for their education, but they certainly benefit from high quality education, which eventually pays off after they graduate because they usually land a high-paying job.

By contrast, at Island University, Michael states, “All we need to do is prepare people for the hospitality industry and tourism. We don’t need very big education for that. We don’t need to be critical thinkers.” He thinks that academic capitalism narrows the scope of the university’s missions, and that each department becomes sort of a vocational school to train students for specific occupations. Interestingly, Julia mentions that what she thought significant in her teaching was to train students to be critical thinkers in her first couple of years’ teaching. However, she noticed that without sufficient background knowledge of critical thinking, it was not useful and meaningful for students to learn critical thinking skills. Julia sees a discrepancy between what she wants to teach and what she actually can teach in the classroom.

Jennifer states that education becomes a conveyor belt on which a student as a product is added with more information as time goes on. She says:

I also think there is a strong emphasis on efficiency that I don’t remember before. As a student, I felt that universities were places where people came to seek knowledge and try to understand complexities, but more and more I have the feeling that it’s a place where you bring students in, make them pay for their education and then get them out.

Jennifer also states that her purpose of teaching has changed over the past twenty years. In particular, she said, “I always try now to explain what I do in terms of how it will be useful to students when they become teachers or when they become part of the workforce.” Because of pressures from the state government, parents and students, she has to justify what she teaches to convince students that what they are learning is meaningful and useful for their future career.

### **Respect for Normative Inquiry**

Knowledge becomes a commodity to produce benefits because of the spread of academic capitalism (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004), but many interviewees define knowledge differently. For example, Sarah states, “What I think of knowledge in the

traditional sense is to justify true beliefs.” In other words, the pursuit of knowledge is the pursuit of truth in a philosophical sense. She recognizes that one kind of justified truth is more worthy than another and that it does not necessarily generate more income. In a university, the knowledge that students are supposed to acquire is the expansion of the understanding of human experiences and appreciation of artistic expressions such as arts and literature.

Michael distinguishes three kinds of the pursuit of knowledge: empirical research, conceptual inquiry, and normative inquiry in the humanities and social sciences. Empirical research is involved in the data available onsite, and a researcher generates new knowledge inductively by analyzing the data. Conceptual inquiry is the theoretical framework of analyzing phenomena and issues, and a researcher comes up with new knowledge deductively. Normative inquiry is concerned with the fundamental goals or objectives in whatever a researcher attempts to discover. Michael thinks that these ways of pursuing knowledge are everlasting even though academic capitalism has had an impact on the department where he teaches.

Kathryn is a feminist philosopher, and she has a firm belief in the form of knowledge. She thinks that philosophy plays a crucial role in defining knowledge:

I do think that philosophy can achieve results of some kind. I don't think it's endless questioning. I think we actually make some improvements in our understanding of how our words, how politics works, how our selves are formed, how things like racism and sexism continue...What philosophy has that no other field has is normativeness. I mean, some fields have it to some extent but philosophy has a normative goal of asking the question “What should we do?” and not merely being descriptive, not merely describing the results, but considering what we should do, how we should live, how we should create societies, how we should structure education.

As Kathryn clearly indicates, philosophy engages itself in normative inquiry and pursues fundamental questions about human experiences. I agree that students have to acquire critical tools to question what is taken for granted to create a better society, and despite the spread of academic capitalism, which narrows the scope of education, professors should firmly believe in what they think is truthful inquiry.

All of the professors whom I interviewed acknowledge a trend that among students and university administrators, utility-oriented knowledge is more valued than justifiable truthful knowledge. However, due to their belief in the importance of normative inquiry and critical minds, they modify their teaching methods to meet the demands of external pressures.

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