



Academia in New Zealand

By David Edmonds



1. Could you describe how you have pursued your academic interests before coming to Hong Kong?

Before arriving at CUHK, I earned a BSc, BSc (Hons), and MSc in Psychology from Victoria University of Wellington (Te Herenga Waka). My passion has always been in critically interrogating the assumptions, methodology, and topics in psychology. So, even though I shifted to sociology here at CUHK, my project still retains a clear relevance to psychology. My doctoral research is a video-based ethnography of cognitive neuroscience experiments.

2. Is there any difference between academia in Hong Kong and New Zealand in terms of structurally enforced systems or procedures?

There is much less bureaucracy in New Zealand, and as a result, much quicker and easier to get things done and do your research. The first thing that comes to mind, is that you do not have to apply for reimbursement for air travel at my university, it is all done through an online centralized system. In terms of postgraduate programs, most Masters and PhD programs require no coursework, are pretty flexible with extending deadlines, much more inclusive of marginalized groups such as Māori and Pasifika, and there are much longer holidays. Usually students do not have to serve as compulsory TA or CA's, and the workload is much less even when you do. The funding for research is much worse, as I mentioned. But, the relaxed and laid back environment more than makes up for that!

3. How are the roles and interaction between teachers and students managed in New Zealand?

This is perhaps one the most striking differences between academia in Hong Kong and New Zealand. In Hong Kong, the system is much more hierarchical. In New Zealand, we are not expected to call our supervisors "Professor" and the whole relationship is much more egalitarian and positive.

4. In terms of social issues, is there any phenomenon in New Zealand that could be enlightening for phenomena that scholars study in Hong Kong?

The research from New Zealand on the relationship and fraught history between Māori (indigenous) people and the state would be illuminating for people in Hong Kong. It really shows the structural, social, and deeply ingrained inequalities that Māori people have faced. It throws into sharp relief the systemic institutional racism that pervades our supposedly "brilliant and equal" nation. I think it can inform research in Hong Kong which seems to focus mainly on class and income inequality. I think it would also be illuminating to point to the racism and xenophobia that I sometimes see pervasive, but rarely studied or even mentioned, in Hong Kong society.

[See the full interview](#)

PUBLICATIONS

Olivos, Francisco. 2020. "Untangling causal beliefs: understanding lay theories of happiness determinants using a factorial survey." *Poetics*. ([read the article](#))

Edmonds, David, and Christian Greiffenhagen. 2020. "Configuring prospective sensations: Experimenters preparing participants for what they might feel." *Symbolic Interaction*. ([read the article](#))

My thesis and social issues: Land expropriation by Guolin Gu

Illustration by iStock



My research explores the livelihood outcomes of land expropriation in contemporary rural China: whether losing land transforms some farmers to rentiers and some to precarious workers, in what David Harvey calls “accumulation by dispossession,” the predatory kind of dispossession. This is in contrast to what Marx envisioned in his “primitive accumulation” of capital, a somewhat progressive kind of dispossession, where the loss of land as a means of production and a source of basic subsistence transforms farmers into proletariat workers. However, when the land is lost to building residential compounds, offices, or other commercial use, it does not provide job opportunities for the dispossessed farmers, and they cannot be absorbed into the local workforce easily.

Recent research on dispossession in many developing countries found farmers to be facing the predatory kind of dispossession and suffer worse livelihood outcomes in the long term.

Dispossession in contemporary rural China might be an exceptional case. Some argue that it is primarily driven by local governments seeking fiscal income and to demonstrate political prowess, rather than private capital seeking profit. These local governments are also tasked to maintain social stability and eliminate poverty by 2020. These political-economic motives behind dispossession may result in distinct terms of relocation and employment for the dispossessed farmers. For example, the central government has been promoting the “relocating the poor” initiative this year¹, with specific directives for local governments to assign the relocated and dispossessed farmers to jobs. They might enjoy better livelihood outcomes than the farmers dispossessed in the early 2010s in the same region. I will use survey data and a case study of a dispossessed village in southwest China to investigate the livelihood outcomes of dispossession, and to characterize the kind(s) of dispossession in contemporary rural China.

Related links that might be of interest:

- [Podcast: David Harvey's Anti-Capitalist Chronicles.](#)
- For those interested in land-related research: [RECOLAND – Land-Based Institutions in China](#); Transnational Institute’s [Agrarian & Environmental Justice](#) program; and the [Land Deal Politics Initiative](#).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

✓ Publication opportunity:

- Special issue of Health Sociology review (Q2): Progressing critical posthuman perspectives in health sociology. **Deadline: June 15, 2020** (250-300 words). ([see the ad](#))
- Special issue of the British Journal of Sociology of Education (Q2): The Academic Precariat: Understanding Life and Labour in The Neoliberal Academy. **Deadline: July 17, 2020** (one-page outline). ([see the ad](#))

✓ Job ads:

- Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Sociology at The University of Hong Kong. **Deadline: May 30, 2020.** ([see the ad](#))
- Assistant Professor, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. **Deadline: December 31, 2020.** ([see the ad](#))

¹ For example, see an op-ed on People’s Daily published in April 2020 (in Chinese): [确保易地搬迁移民安居乐业（人民时评）](#). See also a recent notice published by four departments of the central government (in Chinese): [人力资源社会保障部等四部门部署开展易地扶贫搬迁就业帮扶专项行动](#).