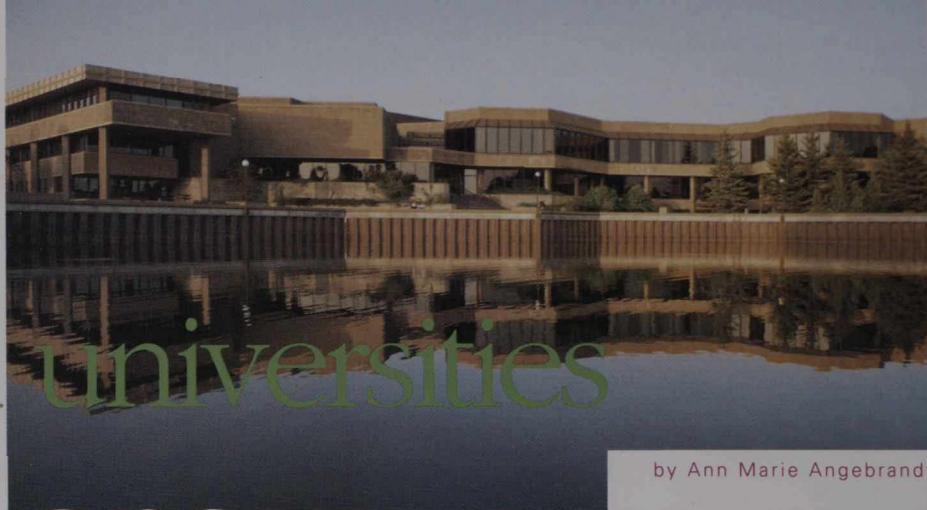


Canadian universities

number **one** destination for Hong Kong students

by Ann Marie Angebrandt



At this very moment, close to 70,000 university diplomas from Canada are hanging on walls around Hong Kong. At least that's the number of Canadian university graduates that Fred Kwok, president of the Canadian Universities Association, estimates currently live in Hong Kong. That means about 1.2 per cent of the territory's current population at some time has graduated from one of Canada's dozens of universities.

Some alumni, such as banking analyst Bradley Dorohoy, a Manitoba-born graduate of Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario have studied in the Canadian education system since Grade 1, only to be lured to Hong Kong by greater opportunities than they expected in Canada.

But the large majority — some estimate as many as 90 per cent — are Hong Kong-born graduates who leave their homes to attend a Canadian tertiary institute, usually in Ontario or British Columbia, and then return.

Indeed, so popular are Canadian universities that Canada has been the number one education destination of Hong Kong university students for the last 30 years. Canadian government statistics show that in 1992, close to 5,000 Hong Kong students enrolled in Canadian institutes, pumping close to half-a-million Canadian dollars into the economy, and bringing the current number of Hong Kong students in Canada up to around 15,000.

While many alumni say that their overseas education has helped them develop prestigious international experience and refine English language skills, the main reason for the education exodus continues to be the lack of opportunities for tertiary education in Hong Kong.

There are now three universities in the

territory (the University of Science and Technology joined the long established Hong Kong and Chinese Universities in 1991) and four polytechnical institutes, but government figures indicate that only about 18 percent of Hong Kong's eligible students are awarded one of the approximately 15,000 first-year places bestowed by strict academic standards. These are filled by Hong Kong's cream of the education crop.

Not surprisingly, the remainder who can afford it, often leave Hong Kong for the wider range of facilities in Canada, many when they are in Form 5 (about 17 years old) to complete their final year of high school in Canada and ensure a place at a Canadian university.

"It was extremely fashionable to attend a Canadian university when I did it," says Kenneth Yuen, a graduate of both the University of Toronto and University of Western Ontario in the mid 1970s, and now a lawyer in Hong Kong. "There was really no choice if your marks weren't outstanding."

Yet despite the demand, most Canadian universities don't aim aggressively at Hong Kong students when recruiting. In fact, due to complicated funding structures, many are penalized when enrolling foreign students.

Instead, it is Hong Kong's 18 or so Canadian university alumni associations that are often the target of university pleas for donations. Most of the associations have memberships of a few hundred, but only a handful have any extra money left over from fundraising events such as annual balls to donate back to their alma mater.

Besides organizing social events for their membership, one of their most important functions is simply to create business networks. After all, this is Hong Kong. ♦

Interested in joining your alumni association?

Here are some contact names:

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