

I appreciate that in the 2023 annual review I received the standard, across-the-board civil service pay adjustment.

These are issues that all too frequently occupy my mind:

- (1) In the absence of a housing allowance, I am spending half my salary on housing.
- (2) My HKUST Staff Superannuation funds, 6.5 years prior to mandatory retirement, are HKD 6,045,201 (by far too little).<sup>1</sup> There is no saving at the current level of rent payment.
- (3) I am in the lowest remuneration bracket at HKUST.<sup>2</sup> My real salary has been flat for a dozen years, and near-flat for twenty years.<sup>3</sup> I am being serially denied sabbatical leave.<sup>4</sup> I see what leads to promotions<sup>5</sup> and chair professor titles,<sup>6</sup> and what happens at the “mandatory” retirement age.<sup>7</sup>

### Teaching.

My no-pay leave visit to Princeton University in 2022/23 was spent creating a new set of Chinese economy courses for a different (Princeton) clientele and developing a new graduate macroeconomics course. This pre-occupation with teaching, which includes applying economic analysis and factual knowledge to current events,<sup>8</sup> continued into fall 2023 and spring 2024. Teaching consumes four days of the week (incl. a 5-hour commute on lecture days). A student in my fall 2023 course SOSC 1440 nominated me for the 2023 Common Core Teaching Excellence Award; in my “teaching portfolio” submission<sup>9</sup> I include an explanation of how the common core violates academic freedom (and do not get the award).

I am a researcher as much as a teacher. Therefore, I wonder if I shouldn’t follow the model of SOSC 3001: Limit my teaching to just one course<sup>10</sup> (taught again and again) on a narrow, mostly historical topic that needs minimal updating, get a teaching reduction in order to create a few hours’ worth of lecture videos for the course, limit the student intake to 15-20 (maximally 35), hold the class in 3-hour blocks, give a lecture only in the first and last class and cover all other classes with the videos (which students view themselves) and student group presentations / discussions. This approach also happens to be highly correlated with mandatory retirement at HKUST being postponed forever.

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<sup>1</sup> HKD 6,045,201 (end-2023 statement) affords 20 years of health insurance for two in the country of my passport, Germany or a 300sqft apt. in Mid-levels, or a monthly pension of HKD 14,400 for 35 years.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://carstenholz.people.ust.hk/Initiative/2023-11-28-Salary2023.pdf> .

<sup>3</sup> The cumulative shortfall of not always receiving the full, annual civil servant pay adjustment is HKD 641,238 (as of 31 March 2024). Civil servants further receive salary increments and promotion-based salary increases.

<sup>4</sup> See entries of 2021 / 3 and 2021 / 10 / 18 at <https://carstenholz.people.ust.hk/Initiative.html> .

<sup>5</sup> See <https://carstenholz.people.ust.hk/Initiative/2023-4-30%20FORS%20PersonalStatement%20CarstenHOLZ%20April2023.pdf> .

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, <https://carstenholz.people.ust.hk/Initiative/2021-4-12-CarstenHolz-Statement-Self-Nomination-ChairProfessorship.pdf>, and compare to current division roster of chair professors.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://carstenholz.people.ust.hk/Initiative/2023-11-28-Salary2023.pdf> .

<sup>8</sup> That holds for all courses I am currently teaching. Any course on the Chinese economy is updated annually and a mostly new set of weekly if not twice weekly assignments created to address current events.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://carstenholz.people.ust.hk/Initiative/2024-2-16-HOLZ-CommonCoreAwardSubmission.pdf> .

<sup>10</sup> I have more than a dozen non-overlapping courses under my belt and a great number of variations on the Chinese economy.

## Research.

I am reminded of 2008-2010, when, after having been denied full professorship, I ended up focusing on teaching.<sup>11</sup> That was followed by yet more, and intensive teaching at USC, on no-pay leave from HKUST, and shifted back to research only in my long overdue, denied, and ultimately self-financed(!) “sabbatical” year at Stanford University in 2012/13. Today, again, a sabbatical is long overdue. There is a reason why a pattern of one semester (or year) of sabbatical leave after five semesters (years) of teaching has evolved historically as the winning formula. By summer 2025, my 30 years of employment at HKUST will have come with 2—instead of 5—years of sabbatical leave, zero regularity, and the accompanying loss of agency.<sup>12</sup> A great number of half-finished projects are on my computer; one after the other they become outdated/overtaken. There is an overload of working papers, half-finished papers, paper drafts, and dozens of article ideas that never come to fruition.

Looking back, first, I have been highly productive in research when I was able to focus on research: during my self-financed sabbatical in 2012/13, my HKUST sabbaticals (the last one in 2014/15), and when I managed to re-arrange courses to create a teaching-free semester. Second, long-term stability seems to be conducive to research: For the last dozen years such stability has evaded me given the extensive hassles of (very) frequent moving in order to first stretch out the (small) home financing allowance (never enough to pay the rent) and then to keep a lid on the completely self-financed rent payments.<sup>13</sup>

I am also apprehensive about sitting high up in an ivory tower when the ground floor is on fire. Shorter pieces on current societal matters raise the specter of arrest (which I equate with a death sentence). Self-censorship feels unsatisfactory, while not self-censoring raises anxiety levels. The current environment in Hong Kong is paralyzing.<sup>14</sup>

With the clock ticking towards mandatory retirement in 2030, two questions that I am asking myself are: (1) What research do I still want to do, and how do I find the time and peace to do it? (2) What happens on 30 June 2030 when, given the limited superannuation funds and accumulated savings, I am unable to stay in Hong Kong (and the political situation advises my departure)? A next home doesn’t suddenly appear out of nowhere.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Half a dozen of the students in those small, c.15-student upper-level undergraduate courses went on to Master and PhD studies at top U.S. universities. Fifteen years later, I have been unsuccessful in my attempt to replicate the intimacy and dynamism of those earlier classes in my current 40-student 4<sup>th</sup> year undergraduate course.

<sup>12</sup> HKUST managers’ fake “sabbatical” leave not only violates English language, common sense, and the professional norm, but is also inconsistent with the claim that HKUST is a research university and with HKUST’s core value of “integrity.”

<sup>13</sup> Economizing on rent means the ability to save. Frequent moving and housing improvisation are the result of earlier HKUST management decisions (see <https://carstenholz.people.ust.hk/Initiative/2023-9-19-Current%20Rent.pdf> and the further links provided in that document). One side effect has been the relinquishment of two decades of research on Chinese statistics (for which I was known in academia and to journalists) when continuous and easy access to a large collection of print statistical volumes ended.

<sup>14</sup> Trusting the division’s “strong China research focus,” ([https://shss.hkust.edu.hk/divisions/social\\_science](https://shss.hkust.edu.hk/divisions/social_science))—with implications ranging from teaching three courses outside my discipline of economics in my first year at HKUST (and onwards) to publishing in *The China Quarterly*—I cannot get a job elsewhere, neither in economics (being too much of a country generalist) nor in ‘sinology’ (being too much of an economist). For the next Research Assessment Exercise, I have been listed in the field of political science.

<sup>15</sup> Finding a home overseas is not facilitated by HKUST “leave” rules that turned Hong Kong into a prison for 35 years, the bulk of one’s adult life.