

## Exploring the Paradigms of Higher Education Research: Emerging Research Discourses in China and the UK (0270)

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Institutionalised initiatives in HE research, whether they originate at the national or international levels, have established their own hierarchies of knowledge where certain kinds of knowledge claim higher standing and greater influence over other kinds (Lyotard 1984; Shahjahan 2011; Filippakou 2016). Knowledge about HE research that is validated internationally, typically through publications in North American or European journals, commands a higher status than work published in 'non-western' contexts, often regardless of how relevant or closely connected it may be to the issues of those higher education systems (Said 1978; Naidoo 2008). Similarly, higher status is conferred upon work that conforms to the evidentiary and analytical standards of 'western' social sciences, often regardless of how pertinent the questions it asks are to the realities of those systems (Engels-Schwarzpaul & Peters 2013; Marginson & Sawir 2011). These 'western' perspectives are increasingly being challenged by a range of scholars who refer to the more complex histories, ideologies and policies of international higher education from local, 'non-western' perspectives (Leite, 2010; Yang, 2014). In recent years, a number of common issues and trends in HE research have been highlighted in the literature and there is increasing awareness in reviews commissioned by governments and international organisations of the need for new policy frameworks to acknowledge the emerging similarities and differences in international research discourses (Altbach et al 2009; Tight 2008, 2012). Research which aims to equally valorise non-western literature, research and perspectives remains rare, however, and this research aspires to scope out ways in which this imbalance could be redressed.

The paper falls into two interrelated areas: (i) The evolution of higher education research in China and the UK between 1995 and 2015: It was in the mid 1990s when Chinese HE began its phenomenal growth and started developing more international partnerships and links with foreign institutions across the globe (Gallagher et al, 2009; Hou, Montgomery and McDowell, 2014; Montgomery, 2016). (ii) The key themes and methodological frames that high-ranking Chinese and UK journals of higher education have

embraced: these hierarchies represent the classic manifestation of power (Foucault 1975; Lukes 1974) and reflect structures of authority and power.

The paper is based on an extensive literature search of journal publications and reviews from, and about HE research between 1995-2015 from mainland China, Hong Kong and the UK. Three snapshots were taken of three key years at decade intervals, 1995, 2005 and 2015 (Tight, 2012) and a selection of higher education research journals in the UK and China were identified in order to build two extensive higher education literature libraries. Two separate libraries have been constructed, one in English and one in Chinese. The systematic literature search of conceptual and empirical studies addressing HE research is being interrogated both qualitatively and quantitatively shedding light on the development and state of HE research in China and the UK across a 20 year period. Literature from a range of accessible sources, including research and key policy papers, has been selected. In addition, 'grey literature' informed by a 'best evidence' approach has been viewed to highlight recent or embryonic developments that may lead to new emerging trends. A number of initial key themes are being identified and these include: research on HE policy; research about pedagogy; research about the organisational nature of HE. A meta-ethnographic approach (Noblit & Hare 1988) has been used to categorize further the main findings under key concepts.

The project is generating both epistemological and methodological findings and surfacing the similarities and differences in the development of HE research in the two countries. For example, differences in research and publishing conventions mean that the volume of research in China is noticeably greater, with Chinese journals publishing much more frequently than UK journals, in some cases as much as twice per month. Selection of the parallel Chinese journals to be focused on was also challenging, given the different systems of impact factors operating in the two countries and the fact that in 1995 few Chinese journals published their abstracts in English, an increasing trend over the 20 year period. Challenges of translation of language and concepts and technological incompatibility of search engines have also been interesting methodological findings. Emerging findings regarding the approaches to policy making in the two countries have indicated that 1990s policy in China tended to be presented as edict with an increasing tendency to negotiation of policy over the last 10 years. In contrast, in the UK, where policy has traditionally been based around independent inquiries such as the Dearing report, the UK appears to be moving towards centralisation of policy development, with recent White and Green papers being examples of this (Filippakou & Tapper 2016).

The project as a whole raises complex intercultural ethical issues, underlining the significance of context, time and place in research ethics. The emerging findings outlined above highlight the 'western' and 'non-western' interpretations of the research process and demonstrate the significance of this dichotomy in engaging in cross-cultural research of this kind. Despite the methodological, cultural and linguistic challenges inherent in this work, further research of its kind is crucial in developing a nuanced understanding of global themes emerging in higher education.

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