Transforming into a Global University—A Case Study of Tsinghua University of China (0325)

Zhou Zhong[1], Shuangmiao Han[0]
[1]Tsinghua University, China,
[2]University of Oxford, UK

Research questions, objectives and theoretical framework

This study aims at describing and explaining, through a single case study, **how a university develops and manages its internationalisation at home alongside its international relations abroad in the process of making deep-reaching systematic changes.**

Internationalisation is a set of dynamic processes transforming our world today and higher education in particular. Leading scholars in the field, such as Knight and de Wit have made continuous update of the ideas of internationalisation. Albeit a lacking of wide consensus on what exactly they are and are their relationship, individual universities are internationalising their institutions nonetheless according to their own interpretations of these concepts, and such interpretations are derived from and modified through interactions within, between and beyond universities. Just as individual universities are doing so, so are national higher education systems.

Therefore, the study adopts the symbolic internationalism as the main theocratic framework. The university is seen as a group of people that act toward things based on the meaning those things have for them, and these meanings are constructed and modified within different contexts through social interaction and self-reflective interpretation. The "social interaction" this study explores involves both interactions among the central leadership, academic and administrative departments administrative within the university, and the university's interactions with international partners. The "individuals' self" this study examines refers to a university's identify and character.

The Tsinghua University of Beijing, China presents a very interesting case internationalsation in and of higher education at both institutional and national levels. Founded in 1911, Tsinghua is one of the leading research universities in China. Tsinghua ranked the 59th in the 2016 Best Global University and the first for Engineering Research, according to the US News and World Report. Tsinghua also ranked the 25th in the 2015/2016 QS World University Rankings. In spite of doubts about rankings methods, Tsinghua's international standing today reflects substantial progress of the institution has made since Tsinghua put forward her world-class university strategy in 2003 and China's national strategy of world-class university development put forward in 1998. Moreover, Tsinghua's case is also nested in the bigger picture of China's higher education internationalisation policy since the 1980s.

The main research questions this study explores are as the following:

1) **What are major evolutionary and revolutionary changes Tsinghua have made through internationalisation?**
2) **How do domestic and international/global factors interact to bring out the changes above?**
3) **What the Tsinghua case contributes new dimensions in the idea of internationalisation in and of higher education?**

For evolutionary changes, the study mapped out Tsinghua's continuous reforms and innovations in curriculum, teaching and learning for educating globally competent talent while transforming itself from an engineering institution into a comprehensive university. For revolutionary changes, the study investigates Tsinghua's latest five-year personnel reform that has not only reconfigured the rule of faculty recruitment, promotion and development in line with international standards but also reconceptualise the role of faculty. For integrated evolutionary and revolutionary changes, the study discusses Tsinghua's major joint programmes/institutes across the world through strategic international partnerships. Moreover, the study makes a critical reflection on the making of Tsinghua's latest *Global Strategy*, which is a more holistic and transversal approach towards building a 'leading global university'.

Methods/methodology

This is qualitative single case study supported with a mixed-method approach.

The case study is an exploratory investigation of the complexity instance of international strategies, process and outcomes of Tsinghua University of China, based on a comprehensive understanding of that instance obtained by extensive description and analysis of the instance taken as a whole and in its context.

As a symbolic-interaction research, this study mainly uses participant observation for data collection and analysis. The present authors are one faculty/administrator and one former undergraduate then graduate student at Tsinghua. Through close contact and immersion in the everyday activities, the participants as researchers have developed an insider's view— a good understanding the meaning of actions, defining situations and the process that actors construct the situation through their interaction. In addition to personal and professional experience, the researchers collect systematic data comprising institutional and departmental international policy documents, statistic yearbooks, meetings memos, student reports in international programmes, focus-group and interviews records with faculty, administrators and students, research papers and news reports about Tsinghua's international development, etc..

The qualitative case study is supported with mixed-method approach in data collection and analysis. The study uses quantitative bibliographic information in literature review. The study also uses quantitative coding techniques for content analysis.

Expected outcomes/results

The Tsinghua case presents a Chinese university's interpretation of the idea of internationalisation in and of higher education, and Tsinghua redefines her role in higher education and in the local, national, international, intercultural and global scope respectively through this interpretation. This case also evaluates a university's responses to both lasting and new challenges of internationalisation in and of higher education:

global race for talent, internationalisation at home, teaching-research imbalance, quality of scholarship, role of general education and foreign language learning, equality of global mobility opportunities, global competence, cross-institutional interdependence and deployment of global presence, role of international strategy and of international office, etc. These responses are made through innovative "add-on" solutions and systematic "alignment" of existing institutional strategies in education, research, service, personnel, finance, information, campus development, etc. These challenges, responses and solutions together can assist us for a future scenario scanning of higher education. This study would also conclude with a reconceptualisation of internationalisation in and of higher education.

References

Altbach, P.G. (2004). Globalisation and the university: Myths and reality in an unequal world. *Tertiary Education and Management, 10 (1),* 3-25.

Charon, Joel M. (2004). *Symbolic interactionism: An introduction, an interpretation, an integration*. Boston: Pearson.

Chen, C. CiteSpace II: Detecting and visualizing emerging trends and transient patterns in scientific literature. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 2006, 57(3)*, 359-377.

De Wit, H. (2009). Measuring success in the internationalization of higher education: an introduction. De Wit H. (Ed.) *Measuring Success in the Internationalization of Higher Education.* EAIE Occasional Paper 22. Amsterdam: European Association for International Education, 1-8.

Denzin, N. K. (2001). Symbolic Interactionism (2nd ed.), London: SAGE Publications, 2001.

Han, S & Zhong, Z. (2015). Transforming into global universities: An analysis of research universities' international strategies. *International Journal of Chinese Education, 2015(4),* 28-47.

Hudzik, JK. (2011). *Comprehensive internationalization: From concept to action.* Wastington, DC: Association of International Educators.

Knight J. (2004). Internationalization remodeled: Definition, approaches, and rationale. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 8,* 5-31.

Knight J. (2013). The changing landscape of higher education internationalization – for better or worse? *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education,* 1-7.

Knight, J., De Wit, H (Eds.) (1997). *Internationalization of higher education in Asia Pacific Countries.* Amsterdam: European Association for International Education.

Mok, KH. (2007). Questing for internationalization of universities in Asia: Critical reflections. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 11,* 433-454.

Yin, RK. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods.* New York: SAGE Publications.

Zhong, Z, Ulicna, D., & Han, S. (2014). Relevance and responsiveness of higher education, China and the EU compared. *Internationalisation of Higher Education: An*

EAIE Handbook. European Association for International Education, issue 3, 1-30.

QS World University Rankings. (2015). Retrieved from http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2015#sorting=rank+region=+country=+faculty=+stars=false+search=

Best Global University. (2016). US News and World Report. Retrieved from http://www.usnews.com/education/best-global-universities/rankings

Top Engineering Universities in the World. (2016). US News and World Report. Retrieved from http://www.usnews.com/education/best-global-universities/engineering