Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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Chaired by Namrata Rao

Thu 12 Dec 2019

16:00 - 16:30

Developing Intellectual Leadership as Women Scholars: A Cross-disciplinary Analysis in Hong Kong

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Research Domain: Academic practice ,work, careers and cultures (AP)

Abstract: In higher education, intellectual leadership indicates scholars' capacity to make impacts on scientific and technological development, and institutional, social and cultural reform. Hong Kong higher education, as one of the global systems, has increasingly been operated in the neo-liberal logic. As the nontraditional powerbrokers, women scholars' academic development may be further impeded due to socio-cultural stereotypes, the gendered nature of academic work. Hence, the development of intellectual leadership of women professors requires further investigation. The study has applied the multiple-case qualitative approach with in-depth interviews. A theoretical framework integrated with Robert Merton's Cumulative (dis)Advantages Theory and Bruce Macfarlane's model of intellectual leadership has been used. Twenty women full professors in Hong Kong universities in STEM and non-STEM fields were interviewed. The preliminary results show that disciplinary features should be further considered within one field. Epistemological characteristics and gender may intertwine and affect women scholars' patterns to accrue intellectual capacity.

Paper: Intellectual leadership means an individual's capacity to make on scientific-technological development, as well as institutional, social and cultural reform (e.g., Kuhn, 1963; Macfarlane, 2012). In higher education, intellectual leadership closely relates to scholars' ability to make open and critical inquiries, to debate their ideas, to conduct research even against the mainstream stands, and to publish their research results freely. Gradually participating and competing in the higher education arena since the early 20th century, academic women have been situated in the relatively marginalized positions due to the gendered nature of academia (e.g., Poole et al, 1997), and the neo-liberal practices caused by globalization and internationalization of higher education (e.g., Aiston & Yang, 2017). The under-representation of academic women in formal leadership positions in higher education institution has been widely recognized, while studies on women scholars' intellectual leadership development across disciplines have been scant (Morley, 2015, Oleksiyenko & Ruan, 2019).

As a global city, Hong Kong has become more market-oriented and emphasized more on productivity in higher education to enhance its international competitiveness (Mok, 1999). In the era of massification of higher education, critical challenges, collaborative academic work, and some of the humanities and social sciences research with limited measurable outcomes may be further discouraged (Baert, 2018). Scholars navigate their academic advancement based on epistemological properties and academic practices, e.g., different communication patterns in soft-hard, pure-applied academic tribes (Becher & Trowler, 2001). The study tempts to delve into the patterns of women scholars' career paths in STEM and Non-STEM fields. It tries to address the research question from the cross-disciplinary perspectives: how do women scholars develop their intellectual leadership?

The study utilizes Merton's (1968, 1988) framework of cumulative (dis)advantage in science and Macfarlane's intellectual leadership model to conceptualize and analyze the data. The cumulative (dis)advantage framework, also termed as Matthew Effect in science, has been used to interpret the screwed distribution of recognition and rewards among scientists. It allows the investigator to make sense of the process of female scholars cumulating advantages despite possible obstacles brought by gender. Macfarlane's (2012) four-orientation model of intellectual leadership—"knowledge producer", "academic citizen", "boundary transgressor", and "public intellectual"—demonstrates a holistic mapping of a professor's academic roles, which could be a powerful tool to assist the analysis of intellectual leadership. The integrated application framework of two theories is expected to explain how individual academic women develop their intellectual leadership in different academic roles within their professional domain.

This study adopts the explanatory multiple-case study approach. The qualitative research methods including academic profile analysis and in-depth semi-structured interview are applied. Participants' selection concerns three criteria: full professor title as the primary indicator for seniority and academic excellence; individual research impact, and the sustainability and activeness of research and teaching engagement. Twenty women full professors (fifteen in non-STEM and five in STEM disciplines) with distinguishing accomplishment in Hong Kong were interviewed. The qualitative data analysis software Nvivo is used.

 The preliminary results of the study show as the following.

1) These participants cumulate advantages for intellectual leadership from all academic roles as "knowledge producer", "academic citizen", "boundary transgressor" or "public intellectual". The initial strong role can effectively strengthen their merits in other roles. In non-STEM fields, participants are more prone to start from "academic citizens" or "boundary transgressor". 2) Epistemological characteristics of a discipline impact considerably on these women scholars' strategies to accrue intellectual capacity. Disciplinary features within a discipline of STEM or non-STEM diverse drastically. When investigating participants' career path, further considerations of "soft" and "hard", "pure" and "applied" natures of a certain field should be taken. There are relatively "softer" fields in STEM and "harder" field in non-STEM. In the softer fields, women professors in this

study may invest a larger amount of time and resources as "academic citizens" and/or "public intellectual". It may result in obtaining rewards and recognition at an older age. In the harder disciplines, female professors apt to concentrate on "knowledge producer" from the first beginning and gain significant resources and fame at an early stage of career. 3) Women scholars in the study share the consensus of family obligations as a potential burden. Those in the softer and cross- and inter-disciplinary fields, especially using qualitative methods and researching non-mainstream subjects, are prone to consider gender as a disadvantage, e.g., in terms of knowledge production hierarchy and power relation in academe. In contrast, those in harder disciplines tend to view gender as a neutral factor. 4) Gender may serve as merit in some new/ marginal disciplines. Those previously less established research areas provide easier entrée and more space for women scholars in this study to build their intellectual capacity than those well-established ones.

The study is expected to offer several new angles to capture the cumulative process of women scholars' intellectual leadership. It tries to add a dynamic lens to Macfarlane's intellectual model of professors and incorporate the cross-disciplinary perspective in STEM and non-STEM fields into the analysis. By doing so, it hopes to provide creative insights for higher education policymakers to facilitate women academics' intellectual leadership in a global city.

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