

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

0154

Mon 06 Dec 2021

10:15 - 10:35

Outsiders on the Inside?: Constructing Chinese Academic Staffs' Experiences in an International Joint University

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

Abstract: Transnational higher education (TNHE) has been a fast-developing sector in Chinese higher education as a measure to actively engage in globalisation. International joint university (IJU), among TNHE institutions, represents a more equal relationship in Sino-foreign cooperation. However, the case university used in this research - Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) - still demonstrates a tendency of valuing Western knowledge and expertise. This research focuses on Chinese academic staff working in XJTLU, aiming to explore their perception of internationalising efforts made by XJTLU, and the process of them constructing and negotiating their identity during their academic experiences in a working environment characterised by a high level of internationalisation. This research adopts a Bourdieusian framework and analyses whether Chinese staff with Western educational background see working in IJU as a natural step, i.e., whether this field is compatible with their habitus, and the extent they internalise the field and the influence on their understanding of internationalisation.

Paper: Under the influence of globalisation, Chinese higher education becomes increasingly decentralised (Qian and Verhoeven, 2004) and capitalised (Xiang and Shen, 2009; Liu, 2020) in the post-1978 era. The tendency of viewing domestic education in China as a shortage and international education as surplus (Iftekhar and Kayombo, 2015), alongside the decentralising tendency, generally motivated the development of the China-foreign educational cooperation, introduced in policy text as "Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools" (CFCRS). Transnational higher education (TNHE) has been one of the fast-developing sectors in Chinese higher education since the late 1980s as a measure to actively engage in globalisation. There are various types of TNHE institutions, while exchange programmes and branch campuses received much of the attention in the literature, international joint university (IJU), defined as "the independent internationally co-founded or co-developed institutions licensed by the host country but developed through international collaboration" (Knight, 2014, p.112), remained an underexplored area. IJU, among other types of TNHE, represents a more equal relationship in terms of Sino-foreign cooperation and power

relations. However, while nominally equal, the case university selected in this research - Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) - makes English as its instruction language although it is in China, and the promotional text largely emphasises the diversity of its staff profile, which might lead to a marginalisation of the Chinese staff.

Therefore, this research focuses on this specific group - Chinese academic staff working in XJTLU, aiming to explore the way they perceive the internationalising effort made by XJTLU, and the process of them constructing and negotiating their identity during their academic experiences in a working environment characterised by a high level of internationalisation. This particular group has been underrepresented in the literature which might be due to the fact they are less expected to encounter, for example, challenges associating with cross-cultural adaptations, as compared to the expatriate scholar; current literature talking about the challenges facing domestic staff is more related to managerial aspects (e.g., Shams and Huisman, 2012), instead of the way they construct and negotiate their identity. This research adopts a Bourdieusian framework and tries to analyse whether Chinese staff with Western educational backgrounds see working in IJU as a natural step, i.e., whether this field is compatible with their habitus, and the extent they internalise the field and how that might influence their understanding of internationalisation. This framework is thought to have a strong explanatory power because of, firstly, the relational nature of the concept "habitus" and "field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), which could be fit for explaining the interaction between social structures and individual agency; secondly, this research is situated in the background of the unequal power relation between the knowledge of "West" and "non-West", where the West (Western culture, language, lifestyle, etc.) is attached with more valuable symbolic capital, which could lead to symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1984) against the non-Western practice. After browsing the staff profile, it is found that most of the academic staff working in XJTLU have been educated in Western countries, therefore, it may be relevant to incorporate the Bourdieusian criticality into this research.

This research adopts qualitative methodology, particularly, a series of semi-structured interviews are used. Due to the contested definition of internationalisation, qualitative methodology is preferred in this research as it provides thick descriptions which are necessary to explore the meaning of it to different actors (Mok, 2007). This research aims to include 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Chinese academic staff working in XJTLU, of different ages, sexes, disciplines, educational backgrounds and at different stages of their academic career, using convenience sampling. However, one of the important criteria is the participants need to join XJTLU less than five years, as this research attempts to capture the staff's perceived compatibility between habitus and field in their early phase of joining XJTLU. Interview questions will fall into categories "reason to choose XJTLU as a workplace", "their perceptions of how XJTLU enact internationalisation", "how do they enact internationalisation in their teaching/researching" and "whether they see themselves fit the environment of XJTLU". Since the researcher is still doing interviews at this stage, in this conference, the researcher will mainly cover the theoretical aspect, especially, why a Bourdieusian perspective is deemed insightful in terms of structuring questions and analysing. This research is believed to contribute to the understanding of internationalisation in the Chinese context, and generally join the

dialogue of the importance and relevance of international education.

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