

Exploring government scholarship policy - the case of Chinese Government Scholarship (CSC)

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Research Domains

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Abstract

This research analyzes the Chinese government scholarship policy managed by the China Scholarship Council (CSC). Its purpose is to explore the actors and the relationships in this government scholarship policy, including what I argue are 'new' scholarship actors: employers and local education departments. In addition, gift theory (Mauss, 1954) is used to analyse the relationship between the actors. As the example of analysis result, the Chinese government scholarship is used as a gift to expand China's positive influence after the recipients go abroad, revealing the scholarship as an element of the country's soft power. The research contributes conceptually by highlighting the need to consider new actors in the scholarship research. This reworking of previous research framework (Saling, 2023) will be useful for future comparing scholarship research. Furthermore, it is the first to employ gift theory in higher education scholarship research, which will increase the theoretical options available in this field.

Full paper

The CSC Scholarship, China's largest public founded study abroad program, awarded 10,600 scholarships in 2023(CSC,2023). Although the program was launched in 2007, the lack of a comprehensive study has resulted in a relatively single research perspective and methods. This research therefore aims to fill these gaps.

This paper will adopt the Saling (2023) framework, which is a new approach that focuses on the invisible and explicit relationships between the scholarship actors. This framework is useful to describe and explain the relationships between the scholarship organization, students, and university in the context of ISM.

In this research, descriptive policy analysis will be chosen to explore the CSC scholarship actors combined with the framework of Saling (2023). This research focuses on descriptive analysis of publicly available policy documents, summarising and exploring the scholarship actors involved and the relationships between them. All documents in this study were searched through Google Chrome, which

means that they are publicly available. In addition, there are no restrictions on the form of policy documents, including speeches, and the contents of newspapers or other CSC-related documents are also covered.

After descriptive analyses of CSC policy documents, we identified new scholarship actors, and the updated framework (figure 1) with new actors is based on Saling (2023).

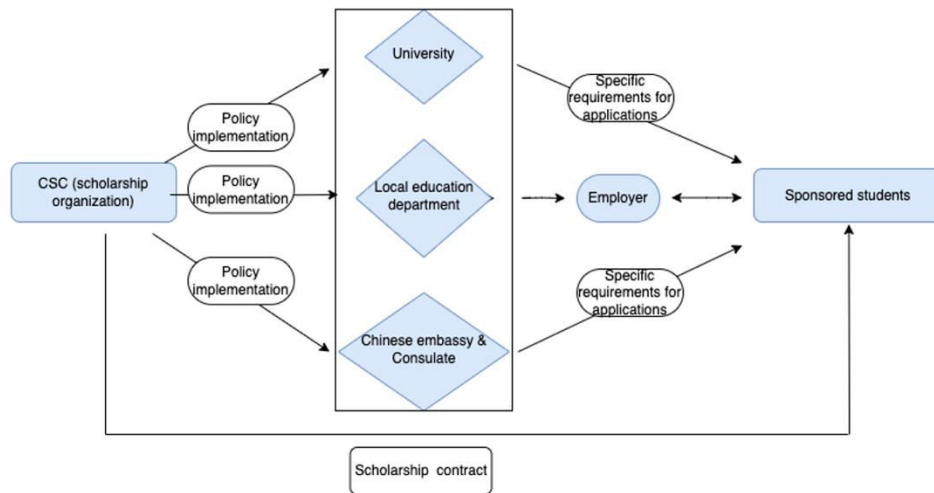


Figure 1. Key actors in sponsored CSC scholarship

Saling (2023) framework is placed in the CSC Scholarship to summarise the main actors. The main actors involved in the updated framework (figure1) are the scholarship organization, the sponsored students. In addition to these, there are local education authorities, universities, and embassies and consulates abroad. It is worth noting that the employer is one of the actors because the employee needs to apply for the scholarship through the local education department and the employee needs supporting documents from the employer.

After summarising the new scholarship actors, we explore the relationships. Here we introduce the theory from anthropology, *gift theory* (Mauss, 1954), to analyse scholarship policy. Gift theory means the relationship between giver and the receiver (gift from the giver to receiver, and the receiver return something to the giver). The most representative example from the gift theory study is 'Marriage'. Specific cases of marriage as a gift theory have appeared in the writings of both Chinese and

Western scholars on the study of gifts (Yan, 2020). Therefore, marriage and scholarship will be used as a comparison to justify the application of gift theory. The scholarship is considered as a gift and has both a giver and a recipient, which is the same as the subject of the gift. In addition, the awarding of a scholarship is also a material representation, which is the same as the exchange process of a gift. The reason for using gift theory is that it is a two-way relationship, focusing on the 'giving back' aspect of the student's perception as opposed to the impact of a single scholarship on the student.

In the results of the discourse analysis of CSC scholarships using gift theory. We obtained information about changes in power and relationships between the actors. For example, at the stage of application. Since some of the scholarship applicants apply through the university, the university will add extra conditions to the original CSC application criteria in order to select more outstanding students. At this point, the university has more power than the applicant. It is worth noting, however, that in a speech (PKU, 2023), the university's leader also suggested that selecting the best students to study abroad would enhance the university reputation and influence. At this time, not only do the recipients see the scholarship as a gift that allows them to have more diverse platforms for learning, but the country also sees the scholarship as a gift of a demonstration of its soft power, and the university also sees the scholarship as a gift for selecting the better students to enhance its reputation, and then to attract more international talent.

The contribution of this research. Firstly, the framework based on Saling (2023) is updated with scholarship actors. Besides that, it is a conceptual contribution, as the first research to apply the gift theory in higher education scholarship, demonstrates the applicability of the theory in the exploration of scholarships, as well as the originality of this study. In addition, in terms of practice, this study will allow for a more diversified perspective on the implementation of CSC scholarship policy. Finally, it will enrich the research in the field of scholarship and provide information for researchers who wish to do comparative studies.

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