

UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

Has the International Joint University Lived Up to Its Promises?

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Introduction

- Internationalisation as promises and commitments to benign and progressive activities (Hudzik, 2011)
- Can internationalisation be defined in an a priori manner?
- A planned approach to internationalisation may potentially undermine the spontaneous interactions and developments that arise from practice
- This research acknowledge internationalisation as a process, a commitment, and an ad-hoc collection of international and cross-border activities

Introduction



- “Internationalisation at home” (IaH) as promises to bring international elements to domestic HE
- IaH is supposed to “offer[s] a democratisation of the benefits of internationalisation to a much wider segment of society than that which could be, or wanted to be” (Harrison, 2015, p. 414), abroad
- Institutions construct their own ways of living up to perceived promises of IaH
- Transnational higher education (TNHE) as an embodied form of the promises of IaH




Introduction

- TNHE is as the “mobility of an education program or higher education institution/provider between countries” (Knight, 2016, p. 36) or the phenomenon where “learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based” (Council of Europe, 2007).
- TNHE institutions can be categorised into various types based on different premises, suppliers, and target students (Wilkins, 2018), including types such as branch campus and joint venture institutions

Introduction

- TNHE institutions can be categorised into various types based on different premises, suppliers, and target students (Wilkins, 2018), including types such as branch campus and joint venture institutions
- Due to national policy (Chinese–Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools), in China, TNHE can only be operated as joint venture



Article 62 No foreign educational institution, other organization or individual may establish unilaterally schools or other educational institutions providing education mainly to Chinese citizens within the territory of China.





Introduction

- Chinese TNHE institutions can exhibit significant variations in their practices and daily operations, depending on the nature of their partnerships and founding institutions
- Relatively flexible and less government-controlled, while being limited to the potential to reshape Chinese HE scene – "marginal revolution" (Ding, 2019)
- Inaccuracies in policy language which failed to reflect actual needs and have proven challenging to implement in practice
- Still tend to benefit economically developed areas & individuals, contradicting the SUPPOSED principle of IA (Mok and Han, 2017)

Research Questions

Has the International Joint University Lived Up to Its Promises of internationalisation?

Sub-questions

- How did international joint university construct internationalisation through its website?
- How do returnee staff engage with internationalisation?
- How do Chinese students engage with internationalisation?



Literature review: internationalisation through website

Internationalisation as “compensatory move”

- The language pertaining to internationalisation is judiciously employed to strike a delicate balance between institutional performance and a standardised set of benchmarks

Internationalisation as conception-creating

- Internationalisation has been incorporated into university website, as “both a guide and a standard for institutions seeking to translate policy into practice” (Dumanig and Symaco, 2022)



Literature review: internationalisation through website

Incorporating internationalisation into website: challenge

- Neoliberal discourse and influence can limit universities' ability to adopt diverse strategies for internationalisation (Lomer et al., 2023)

Internationalisation on TNHE website

- TNHE institutions emphasise being international and leading (Ong and Chan, 2012; Han, 2016)
- “Mainstream resources are overwhelmingly oriented toward achieving “successful” internationalization, rather than prompting thoughtful engagements and systemic analyses around why or how we should do so” (Buckner and Stein, 2020)



Literature review: internationalisation through academic staff in TNHE

Internationalisation as motivation

- International staffs are motivated by convenience and willingness to explore

Mismatched Internationalisation

- Unfamiliarity with the local context can gradually diminish their ability to contribute, leading to a retrospective failed strategy (Lin and Liu, 2017)
- International staff can experience marginalisation and isolation
- Unpreparedness and difficulties resulting from the gap between their expectations and their lived experiences (Chen and Zhu, 2020)



Literature review: internationalisation through academic staff in TNHE

Contextual interpretation to policy

- Teachers often employ a flexible and selective use of two languages, providing the main content in English while ensuring key points are reiterated in Chinese to aid comprehension (Gu and Lee, 2019; Hu et al., 2014)
- In the pursuit of internationalisation, both teachers find themselves caught in a dilemma between the symbolic significance of English and its actual teaching and learning impact (Gu and Lee, 2019, p. 395).



Literature review: internationalisation through TNHE students

Internationalisation as compensation

- Chinese students were often drawn to TNHE based on unsatisfactory grades, substitution of studying abroad, alumni recommendations (e.g., Fang and Wang, 2014; Han, 2023)

- Chinese students view TNHE institutions as closely resembles Western HE, where adhering to the rule of legitimising English as the primary mode of communication on campus is essential.
- Might relate to the promotional priorities of TNHE universities, which often focus on quantifiable indicators to boost student enrolment while overlooking the “four-year experience on campus” (Yu, 2021, p. 234)



Literature review: internationalisation through TNHE students

Challenges with Internationalisation

- Challenges associated with learning in English
 - neither their hopes of improving their English nor their ability to comprehend course material in English had been fulfilled (Hu and Lei, 2014)

- While the enhancement of English proficiency can serve as their initial expected capital, which is also encouraged by the university, when their English ability hinders them from achieving desirable learning outcomes, the prescribed route is challenged.
- Students appear to derive some benefits from their experience of managing risks and challenges in TNHE (Gu and Lee, 2019)

Methodology

Research Design and Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mixed method, single case study design of an international joint university X
Research Instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• document research, interviews & focus group
Participants/Respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 11 Chinese academic staff and 29 Chinese students then working/studying at X
Document	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 55 pieces of University News, Vision & Mission pages
Data Gathering	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online interviews with convenience and snowballing samplings
Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thematic analysis both inductively and deductively

FINDINGS:

How does university X construct internationalisation?

The language has a strong focus on being recognised as internationalised – as a game changer of Chinese HE

- E.g., the exam-oriented educational culture is positioned as in stark contrast with X's transformative, emancipatory learner-centred pedagogy which allows global citizens with an international outlook to be cultivated.

The tone-setting of vision and mission statement tend to regard the defining internationalisation as taken-for-granted

- X claims to have the “right tool, skills and networks” to internationalise its workforce but without justification

FINDINGS:

How does university X construct internationalisation?

Ambivalence on language use

- Perpetuating certain assumptions about internationalisation that X aims to steer clear of?
- 100% English-medium instruction vs. “increasing internationalisation at universities is not just about speaking English”

Internationalisation is depicted as something in need of reflection

- “These new educational models will not happen overnight and that our existing elite education still needs further optimisation. We should never forget why we started”

FINDINGS:

How does academic staff engage with internationalisation?

Returnees initially consider international joint university as similar to Western universities

- participants initially believed their proficiency in English was a fit and asset for X
- The experiences developed from Western countries is perceived as their competitive advantage, helping them secure a job in an international joint university and thrive in the environment without challenges.

Challenges to be internationalised

- Academics generally did not expect the challenges for students as they prepare themselves more as employee rather than language instructors
- Participants rely on their experiences developed in China as opposed to overseas

FINDINGS:

How does academic staff engage with internationalisation?

Enacting and (re)connecting with internationalisation

- Most participants sensed a conflict between fulfilling X's internationalisation demand and conducting their professional practice in a way they believed most efficiently supported students.
- While internationalisation is intended to be inclusive and horizon-broadening, in principle, it becomes exclusionary and narrows students' scope in practice.

FINDINGS:

How do Chinese students engage with internationalisation?

Getting to know the concept of "internationalisation"

- An almost guaranteed capital
- A make-up second chance for an unsatisfactory exam grade
- Students' perception of TNHE as a stepping-stone has been legitimised by X
- The change from being compromised to being motivated

Expecting internationalisation

- English-language instruction being a key component of forming students' expectation – either being confident or binge-preparing
- A more "free and open" space that distinguish from most non-TNHE
- Some students who have experiencing Western HE expect it would be similar

FINDINGS:

How do Chinese students engage with internationalisation?

Experiencing internationalisation

- Chinese sessions, ideological lessons, not being free as they expected – the feeling of "not signed up for"
- Some students appreciate Chinese sessions as they begin to focus on grades-enhancing instead of language improvement
- Improving English has thus been seen as unnecessary – the prescribed route has been challenged

"Making the most of it"

- An internationalised environment is unintentionally helpful
- Students value a student-centred classroom as a useful preparation for studying abroad
- Students' utilisation of internationalisation is still much in need of institutional support

Discussions and Conclusion

Has international joint university lived up to its promises?

- Does it have a consistent promise, in the first place?
- Did the promise come with the prescribed ways for stakeholders to benefit?

What if international joint university is living up to its promises, but in an unexpected way?

- In many lived vignettes shown in teachers' and students' accounts, they are actively bringing expertise developed overseas, individual experience of interculturality, and willingness to learn content in a more student-centred and critical manner.

Discussions and Conclusion

Suggestions to international joint university

- It might not be the best way to rely on internationalisation as some form of accidental serendipity where students happen to benefit from student-centred pedagogy and passive bilingual education.
- The focus should be on strategically aligning promotional discourse, providing reasonable international exposure, and adopting a more open attitude toward linguistic usage.

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Thank you!

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