

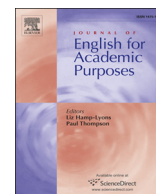


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Seeking entry to the North American market: Chinese management academics publishing internationally



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A B S T R A C T

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Research on how EAL academics in the social sciences engage in international publication has been limited. The case of EAL management academics is potentially interesting because the international standard-seeking business schools around the world, including those in China, are increasingly subscribing to journal ranking systems in which North America-based journals have an overriding presence. At the same time, within the management discipline there has been a growing call for studying the business firms in emerging market countries (such as China), as this research can potentially inform both local and global practices while contributing to the global management knowledge. In this paper I report an interview-based study with 14 English-publishing management academics from seven universities in China. The study, which aimed to understand the participants' perspectives and practices in the publication endeavor, generated findings that highlighted the impact of performative pressure imposed by journal ranking lists, the importance for the academics to capitalize on complementary resources through international collaboration, the potential challenge of writing in English, and the value of knowledge exchange with business practitioners. The study brought forth issues to echo and extend the literature and its findings have implications for policy makers and EAP professionals.

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1. Introduction

Journal ranking systems have undergone a proliferation across disciplines in recent years. A prominent example is the extensive subscription by business schools to a list of 'top-tier' journals used by *Financial Times* for business school research rankings (Adler & Harzing, 2009). Such lists have a global impact and are adamantly upheld by China's aspiring-to-the-top business schools, such as the 'best' ones recently named by *Forbes China* (Flannery & Chen, 2010). Given the wide-spread adoption of the journal ranking lists in business schools around the world and the overriding presence of North America-based journals in these lists (Grey, 2010; Leung, 2007; Tsui, 2004), it can be said that scholars of management who write in English as additional language (EAL), including those Chinese academics who aim to publish in English, are dedicated to seeking entry to the North American market of scholarly publishing.

While the US remains the epicenter of management research, there is a growing interest in creating global management knowledge. As a quick indicator of both trends, the membership of the US-based Academy of Management has grown over 3.5 times from 5244 in 1981 (Tsui, 2007) up to around 18,750 as of September 4, 2013, with active members from 109 countries

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(“Member statistics”). According to Anne S. Tsui, President of the Academy during 2011–2012, “a critical charge for members of the management academy at large in future decades” is that “international management research is not only desirable but also critical to generate knowledge on the management of firms operating in global or novel national contexts” (Tsui, 2007, p. 1353). For EAP researchers, ‘a critical charge’ would be to find out under what institutional and academic conditions “international researchers” (as opposed to “mainstream scholars”) (Tsui, 2007, p. 1353), including those in the discipline of management, are engaged in “publishing international research” (Kirkman & Law, 2005, p. 377) in North America-dominated journals.¹

There has been limited EAP research concerning EAL management academics. Tietze’s work with European management academics (Tietze, 2008a, 2008b; Tietze & Dick, 2009) discloses how the globalization of knowledge-making through the medium of English influences these academics’ work activities. An English language perspective as taken by Tietze is undoubtedly important. The present paper, however, attempts a broader perspective by looking at a number of issues concerning English-publishing Chinese management academics: motivations for international publishing, characteristics of academic collaborations in the endeavor, the tackling of the English language barrier, and the linkage between research and knowledge exchange with practitioners. These issues are examined on the basis of an exploratory interview-based study with 14 Chinese management academics who are actively engaged in publishing in English.

2. Performativity, resource-based view of strategic management, and legitimate peripheral participation

In conceptually framing the study to be reported in this paper, I drew upon tenets related to two constructs in the management research literature: performativity (Fournier & Grey, 2000; Spicer, Alvesson, & Kärreman, 2009) and the resource-based view of strategic management (Barney, 1991; Das & Teng, 2000), and a notion that has often been cited in EAP research on EAL academics’ international publication: legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In management research, performativity commonly invokes such notions as “efficiency, effectiveness and profitability” (Fournier & Grey, 2000, p. 17) and is bound to a ‘performative intent’ (Lyotard, 1984), i.e., “the intent to develop and celebrate knowledge which contributes to the production of maximum output for minimum input” (Fournier & Grey, 2000, p. 17). Performativity assumes a common good toward which management practices should be geared without questioning; it implies an acceptance of the power relationships underpinning the status quo. From this perspective, journal rankings are used as a ‘performative tool’ (Tourish, 2011) by business schools and universities with an intent to enhance their prestige and assess their faculty in the most efficient way; the focus is on measuring and rewarding (materialistically as well as symbolically) ‘indicators’ of ‘high-quality’ research (hitting the top-tier, the number of hits, etc.) rather than the research itself (Macdonald & Kam, 2007). In the reign of a performativity discourse, ‘international’ journals enjoy a higher status than national journals, and publishing in high-prestige scholarly journals is what tenure, promotion, grants and other rewards hinge upon, whereas publishing in a local practitioner’s journal does not count. The overall effect of the performativity that privileges journals based in the Anglophone center/core is that it fosters hegemonic practices which “serve to maintain and reinforce core–periphery relations between the Anglophone core and peripheral countries” (Meriläinen, Tienari, Thomas, & Davies, 2008, p. 584).

An alternative perspective in the management literature has pointed out however, that “performativity is not just about efficiency, but it also involves active intervention into discourse and practice” (Spicer et al., 2009, p. 543). Performativity through the lens of active intervention implicates “subversive mobilizations”, “instead of an overarching concern for efficiency” (Spicer et al., 2009, p. 544). In their publishing activity, academics may take a range of subversive actions, such as: researching on topics concerning real social issues, although the work may be time-consuming and one may not be at an advantage when submitting to a highly ranked journal; publishing in national journals despite their lower status for exchange with domestic, mainly non-English-reading, colleagues; and writing for practitioners, even though such papers are not counted in performance assessment. These counter-performative acts in effect address the social responsibilities of intellectuals (Dunne, Harney, & Parker, 2008).

While the concept of performativity provides a perspective on academics’ possibly accommodationist/subversive practices of publication, the resource-based view of strategic management (Barney, 1991; Das & Teng, 2000) throws light on international academic collaboration (Ou, Varriale, & Tsui, 2012). According to this view, a firm’s sustained competitive advantage depends on its ability to acquire and produce complementary resources in a cost-effective way. In the same vein, being able to synergize resources and achieve complementarity is essential to the success of international academic collaboration. It can be suggested that in an EAL scholar-led international collaborative relationship formed for center-targeted publication, three types of complementary resources stand out. These include, firstly, dominant paradigm knowledge where center experts are in a favorable position, or knowledge needed for publishing in the center’s research paradigm, e.g., knowing what knowledge counts, how to present research in writing, and how to respond to reviewers’ comments (Ou et al., 2012); secondly, contextual/local knowledge (Canagarajah, 2002; Ou et al., 2012) or “deep knowledge about the physical, historical, political,

¹ ‘Mainstream’ North American scholars are often considered as the prototypical ‘center scholars’; while ‘international researchers’ roughly correspond to the notion of ‘periphery scholars’ (Canagarajah, 2002). Nevertheless, as Canagarajah has pointed out, it is important to recognize that the terms of center/periphery are fluid and “the status of specific communities may change” depending on the domain under question (e.g., the economic, linguistic, or academic domain), whilst heterogeneity also exists within the center and the periphery (p. 42). Overall, it would be still appropriate to regard China as a periphery country in terms of the social science power at the global level, although it is certainly growing in this power (UNESCO, 2010).

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