

The global drive for “world-class” universities is linked with a global movement to create comparable, cross-national indicators of research quality. This linkage creates tensions, perhaps even contradictions, within higher education. On the one hand, and very positively, globalization increases the contact and sharing of information, values, and common agendas, as this special issue of *Higher Education Policy* illustrates. On the other hand, this special issue also illustrates there are negative externalities or “downsides” to this convergence in measures of quality assessment, and there are costs for higher education to the use of monolithic quality measures.

If a world trade in services and ideas promotes competition for market shares of both goods, then it is reasonable that the producers of these goods should compete with each other for a top rank in perceptions of quality and value. Similar to the markets for automobiles or cell phones, globalization has prompted a search for a common metric for university services and the quantity of university output. More than any other product, research publication has become seen as a convertible “currency.” With this currency, consumers and investors, students and industry, can shop across borders. Because publication is, or at least seems, easier to compare than measures of actual learning or direct assessments of research importance, citation indexes have become accepted metrics in the race to create world-class universities.

One purpose of this HEP special issue is to offer a few national examples of the consequences of the pressures associated with a drive for world-class universities and the assumption that English-language

citable research should in fact be an important measure of progress toward that goal. Of course, there is no denying that common metrics of quality and productivity facilitate the mobility of teachers and researchers. But there are costs, and these costs are not borne equally across countries, nor are the benefits received equally across countries. As seen in the essays included in this special issue, pressure to publish in certain journals, and pressure to research topics of interest to English language readers, has been felt most in countries where English is not the national language and where higher education research funding is centralized.

Many of the national journals in which English-language scholars publish their work are classified as “international” from the perspective of non-English scholars. By considering local, non-English journals as less-valuable from a research quality assessment perspective, journal classification has the unintended consequence of discouraging research that is inherently difficult to communicate to English-language readers but that may be of great local importance impact. As Philip Altbach (2006) wrote:

Publication counts often stress established refereed journals included in such databases as those of the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI). These are mainly journals published in English and selected with the norms of the major academic systems of the United States and Britain in mind. While English is increasingly the language of science, it is not necessarily the central medium of communication in the humanities, law, and a number of other fields.

A special challenge when using a single composite measure for ranking universities is that vernacular languages are more important in some fields than others. There are fields with strong national traditions – including education policy, anthropology (two fields discussed in this HEP issue), as well as

jurisprudence, social work, philosophy, and even poetry, where scholars now face similar global pressures for “excellence” (competitively defined). But in all fields, not only in sciences but also in specialties with national missions and readerships, the production of excellent scholarship is increasingly compared based on the metric of publication in an “international” (usually English-language) journal.

Globalization is facilitating a single common language of scholarship and certain research journals in research assessment exercises because nearly all “ranked” journals are published in North America or Europe. In some countries with centralized research funding sources, journals are classified as either “domestic” or “international”, with scholars incentivized to publish in the latter type of journals.

Consequently, it is difficult to justify research about Cantonese versus Mandarin Chinese media of instruction policy in the case of Hong Kong if there is no expectation of publication in the vernacular.

Non-English literatures and topics of less interest to non-English speakers, are not supported in a publishing regime that prioritizes publication in English. Does globalization not then risk homogenization?

Apart from the fact that there are unequal benefits and costs between countries to the establishment of a universal currency of value, there is another downside from an over-emphasis on the pursuit of world class universities, as the essays in this issue clearly show. Promoting a common language of scholarship (usually English), and prioritizing certain research journals in research assessment exercises may lead to a sharper (but narrower) research focus.

What about the benefit to higher education systems from the possibility of comparing research productivity? Does research output not at least serve as one valid indicator of research quality? Perhaps publication did originally indicate quality, but did not once assessment exercises began to consider research productivity as targets for universities to attain. David Bridges, a past president of the British Educational Research Association, (2011, 33) has pointed out a problem with using proxy measures of university quality as targets. He wrote that,

When something shifts from being a measure to a target, then it ceases to be a measure. The trouble is that what start off as perhaps empirically grounded (extrinsic) indicators of quality rapidly become targets that people seek to achieve – and this distorts behaviour in a way which invalidates the original evidence of an association or at least the grounds for believing that the extrinsic indicator has a probabilistic relationship with intrinsic features of quality.

Applying this observation to countries where university funding is tied to research productivity, it seems harder to identify objective indicators for quality when the indicators themselves become targets and therefore have stopped indicating what these indicators were originally conceived to proxy.

This Special Issue of HEP explores publication patterns and their interpretation by researchers in South Africa, Australia, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, and Japan in the contexts of recent histories of higher education governance and finance. The common framework used by individual contributors came from a cross-national research project funded through the World Universities Network (WUN). Across countries and universities, researchers in this project met in Hong Kong, Osaka, and Vancouver to develop and provide mutual critique of a common research design.

Our project first attempted to quantify the publications by all research faculty members affiliated in each university since 1993 in the departments of both Education Policy and Anthropology. By collecting Curricula Vitae and using electronic data bases (Google scholar, and JSTOR), the researchers connected the names of past department members with the titles and (where possible) abstracts or keywords of all academic publications in serial periodicals in 1993, 2003, and 2013. A decision was made not to catalogue monographs or chapters in edited volumes (a choice that was in itself a reflection of the increasing assessment pressures in each country, since in the past national researchers would not have thought first of publishing their research in journals). Information was gathered for all staff members from the focus institution in the departments of Education Policy and Anthropology. At the next stage, the researchers tabulated the articles according to their language, e.g. English, Chinese, Japanese, or other. They also tabulated the numbers of these articles that were published in 1993, 2003, and 2013 according to the location of the journal's publication office. The common research design we adopted then required us to count the numbers of articles appearing in journals that were produced in the country where the education and anthropology researcher worked. In this project, we termed these as "national" publications, regardless of the journals' circulations or whether the term "international" appeared in the journal title. Researchers further tabulated the number of articles in each year that appeared in journals produced outside of the country of the university. We consider these as "international" publications. In other words, our project has not categorized journals according to whether the journals see themselves or advertise themselves as "national" or "international." In our catalogue, for example, the journals American Anthropologist and the

U.S. produced Review of Educational Research are both considered as “national” journals from the perspective of those working in the United States, but they are “international” journals from the perspective of those working in Australia, South Africa, or Japan. Our project focused on the relationship between researchers and their publications as opposed to the status of the publication itself. Next, we attempted to gather abstracts and key words from the articles published in 1993, 2003, and 2013, and with the abstracts or keywords we coded all articles as focused on a national or on a non-national theme. Finally, to help us interpret the trends of the quantitative data on publication, we identified two junior and two senior members of each department in each case, academics respectively having within at least twenty years of experience at the university. With the evidence of publication over a twenty –year period, we asked them for information whether there has been a shift toward "international" journals. Evidently, there has been a shift toward non-local populations, and towards the English language. What pressures, if any, were felt by the respondents, and what did they observe in their colleagues, that can account for these shifts?

With the resources available for a limited project, it was necessary for the WUN project to select only two academic departments in their focus universities, neither of which was oriented toward sciences. We suspected that the shift toward English-language publication had occurred much earlier in medical research and in most sciences. However, we hypothesized that, during the twenty years from 1993-2013, there had been an observable shift in publication within the departments of Education Policy and Anthropology, two fields which in the past had included strong national traditions. Our inventory of publications had the aim of discovering tendencies over the years and possible shifts from national to

international research and also (in the cases of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan) we were interested to know whether there are increasing numbers of publications in English (as opposed to Chinese and Japanese). To anticipate, we found this shift as expected in all of the university cases reported in this special issue (although not, interestingly, in the United States). Our senior research respondents were in no way selected as random samples and they are not representative of all researchers even of their generation within the focus universities, nor perhaps even are they representative of researchers in education policy and anthropology. We are grateful to our research respondents in each university, as well as to the WUN and to the external reviewers selected by HEP.

In Chou's paper 'Trends in Publication in the Race for World-Class University: The Case of Taiwan', the author argues that the new higher education policies in Taiwan have impacted academic culture and research practices in social sciences and humanities. On the one hand, faculty international visibility via publication has improved, but at the expense of local impact and social relevance. By contrast with the Taiwanese experience, in their case study titled 'The Paradox of Autonomy: Academic Publishing and Globalizing Research Universities in Japan', Ishikawa and Sun find a paradox of national autonomy. There is in Japan a continued commitment to locally relevant research but at the expense of global recognition, and the government's declared goal to make some of the nation's top universities "super global" can lead to the erosion of long-sustained vernacular scholarship.

In the most ambitious and wide-reaching essay of this issue, Jun Li compares research assessment exercises in China, Hong Kong and Japan in the East Asian Context. He finds in 'The Global Ranking

Regime and the Reconfiguration of Higher Education’, that all three cases have been affected severely by the regime and that Hong Kong universities are the most “internationalized” and Chinese universities are the most “productive” in research outputs. Li argues the global ranking regime has created a “double bind” for East Asian universities, and has brutally dominated their institutional reconfigurations. To turn the tide, Li proposes that the manipulated emphasis, faulted methodology and unethical desirability of global university rankings and research assessment exercises should be avoided to help universities healthily and meaningfully focus on real missions to which they should commit themselves. Meanwhile, Li pinpoints that critical reflections and policy actions are particularly urgent on the *indigenusness* of knowledge exploration and production by higher education systems in East Asia and other post-colonial contexts. Additionally, Li anticipates that the importance of teaching and service will be revitalized in the new stage of East Asian universities, e.g., the “Chinese University 3.0”, a term Li uses to capture the new development of higher education in China (Li, 2016).

In their contribution on the post-apartheid era, Soudien and Gripper reveal the changing academic profile of South African universities. In ‘The Shifting Sands of Academic Output: University of Cape Town research output in Education and Social Anthropology - 1993-2013’, the authors find that the increasing pressure to satisfy performance management criteria required for promotion and monetary reward has driven researchers in South Africa to become more individualistic in their approach to research output. However, the world trend of journal publication in the pursuit of the world-class university also affected other English-speaking countries.

Tony Welch argues in ‘Re-shaping academic production? Australian research output in the Social Sciences 1993-2013’, that the overwhelming majority of publications remain in English, albeit dealing with research themes and data from many parts of the world, and despite growing numbers of colleagues whose first languages were not English.

Many readers of this special issue will probably already be familiar with the ironic exceptionalism of research assessment in the United States, the country where the majority of highly ranked research journals are currently being published. Because the US has no central Federal funding or regulatory mechanism for higher education (or even basic education: the word is absent from the US Constitution), in the US there are no national standards or metrics by which universities are judged and funded. There has been a popularized, well-known attempt by a for-profit firm to rank universities and programs of study using combinations of subjective and objective criteria that are weighted in particular combinations (but where faculty research is only a small component).¹ There are also attempts to assess higher education using other metrics. For example, two efforts in the United States have tried to give equal weight to the contributions of universities in promoting social mobility and measuring how much students give to their societies (see alternative evaluations by *The Washington Monthly* and by *Colleges That Change Lives*).² The US illustrates that, in the absence of external national pressures, scholars can produce and publish research based on their own

¹ For a humorous discussion of rankings generated by *US News and World Report* (as well as the rankings used by automobile magazine *Car and Driver*), see the contribution by the Canadian wit, Malcom Gladwell,

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/02/14/the-order-of-things>

² http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/college_guide/toc_2015.php <http://www.ctcl.org/>

criteria about its worth. Pressure to publish in certain journals has been felt relatively less in American universities than in countries that rely on government-imposed journal lists and where English is not a medium of instruction.

This special issue of HEP leads to an agenda for policy action as well as to further investigation. If research productivity is becoming seen as the most important comparable criterion for university quality, then professors must address the question of how to appreciate and recognize the value of scholarly inquiry that is focused on their own nations. On what basis will national research ultimately be thought to matter, to have an impact, where it does not appear in citation indexes based on English-language journals? University professors do have options the face of global rankings. Although external pressure can make researchers less complacent and more collaborative, one purpose of higher education is critical reflection about what researchers do and why. After reflection, the knowledge-workers in some countries may exert greater control over the creation of multiple, complementary criteria of quality universities. In sum, we hope that this special issue will provoke further debate and research outside of the English-media university systems about measures of productivity and quality in the drive for “world class” universities. The authors and editors also hope that the included contributions will simulate more discourse about the “Measuring Up” phenomenon of faculty research in the course of global competition in university rankings.

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