English or Chinese? The trade-off between local and international publication among Chinese academics in the humanities and social sciences

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Abstract

Within a global trend of the anglicization of academic publishing, in the humanities and social sciences (HSS) publication in indigenous languages, nevertheless, in many contexts, continues to thrive. Given that the overall anglicization of academic publishing tends to be negotiated at the local level, this study seeks to discover how a potentially competing relationship between English and Chinese might be manifested in the context of China. Focused on the praxis of Chinese HSS academics writing for scholarly publication, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 academics across a range of HSS disciplines at an elite research-based university in China. The study sought to find out, firstly, how and to what extent English is used among these participants, and, secondly, what their attitudes are towards the official policy of encouraging more international publication (in English). The findings, based on this limited sample, suggest that Chinese will most likely retain its dominant position as the language of research and publication for Chinese HSS scholars, but that international publication in English will nevertheless increase. The paper concludes by suggesting that, to facilitate visibility of peripheral scholarship on the part of scholars such as the participants in this study, efforts can be made from both the periphery and the center.

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Introduction

China currently has about 200 million English learners, almost equivalent to the total population of native English speakers in the world (Bao, 2005). With English becoming a compulsory subject of study in 2001 from Grade 3 in Chinese primary schools (and from Grade 1 in some major cities), the figure is likely to rise further. By way of contrast, Graddol (2004, p. 1329) has pointed out: “Chinese (whether one counts only Mandarin or all Chinese dialects, which share a common writing system) is well established as the world’s largest language (in terms of native speakers), and its position will remain unchallenged.”

According to researchers at the Globalization Research Center at the University of Hawaii, international scientific publishing (together with some other key variables, such as foreign language learning and use of a language on the internet) crucially contributes to the process of the globalization of languages, a process whereby some languages are
becoming dominant over others (Steger, 2003). As part of this process, English far out-shadows other languages as the lingua franca of academic publication. Within this global trend of the anglicization of academic publishing, however, there are clear differences between disciplines. The trend toward publishing in English is more pronounced in the hard sciences (Cargill & O’Connor, 2006; Li & Flowerdew, 2007) than in the humanities and social sciences (HSS), although, as Ammon (2006, p. 4) noted, in comparison with such major languages as French, German, and Spanish, English is still “by far the preferred language in the social sciences and the humanities” on a global scale.

The literature has revealed that the choice of the linguistic medium of publication can be mediated by multiple layers of factors. The complexity is well captured in the “Model of Language Selection in Scientific Communication” (MLSSC) proposed by Jernudd and Baldauf (1987) and Baldauf (2001) (as cited in Hamid, 2006, p. 132). The model posits three levels of factors in connection with the choice of language for publication: the macro-sociolinguistic level (e.g., institutional constraints, network/contacts, communities/expectations), the individual level (e.g., skills/feelings/ideologies), and the micro-sociolinguistic level (e.g., language management/resources, setting/role relationships/domains, and modes of discourse). Studies on scholarly publication have often revealed combinations and interactions of variables found across the levels in the MLSSC, featuring, for instance, the role of institutional constraints, communities/expectations, skills (language competence), and language management/resources (e.g., Curry & Lillis, 2004; Shi, Wang, & Xu, 2005). It has also been found that language choice is often accounted for by the target audience or the “communities” that the group of academics concerned targets to participate in (e.g., Berg, Hult, & King, 2001; Burgess, 2002; Casanave, 1998; Curry & Lillis, 2004; Petersen & Shaw, 2002). For instance, Petersen and Shaw (2002) found that for the staff in the different departments of a business school in Denmark, their communication behaviours are determined by the “demands, norms, and language practices” in the diverse “international and local academic, international and local professional” communities they engage with (p. 372). The scope of the target audience has much to do with disciplines, whereby there tends be less call upon locally bound disciplines (e.g., history, literature, politics) to publish in English than that upon more universally based disciplines (most prominently the hard sciences) (Swales, 1990). In reality, though, the picture can be complex rather than displaying clear-cut boundaries. The complexity was illuminated by Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1999), who, also in Denmark, surveyed academics across disciplines at one university and found that the informants can be grouped into three categories: “English-only” (mostly natural scientists), “Danish-mostly” (those in the subject areas of local interest), and multilingual (those from varied disciplinary and personal backgrounds).

Given that the global anglicization of academic publishing, as the above-cited literature indicates, tends to be negotiated at the local level, an interesting question in the context of China is how a potentially competing relationship between English and Chinese might be manifested for Chinese scholars. The following section on “Context” will first outline some developments in contemporary Chinese higher education which bear upon a growing push toward English-medium instruction and publication; then it will present some published views of Chinese academics on the desirability of increasing the use of English in the Chinese academia, noting in particular that a perception among Chinese scholars of the ideological implications of English use has been suggested as a deterrent factor for expanding the language as a medium of instruction and publication in China.

Context

Low visibility of Chinese HSS scholarship at the international level

While Chinese scientists are taking an increasingly large share of the total science publications in such international databases as Science Citation Index (SCI), Engineering Index (EI), and the Index to Scientific & Technical Proceedings (ISTP), the visibility of Chinese scholars in HSS has been strikingly low. According to a report by Zhong (1998), in the 5-year period of 1986–1990, 880 and 306 papers by Chinese HSS scholars were found in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) and the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI), respectively. However, almost all the papers were found in translated journals published by a particular Western academic press that “selects and
translates what are considered important papers from existing Chinese journals” (p. 67). Although it is difficult to obtain relevant quantitative data, more than a decade later, HSS publication in English, it can be said with confidence, has increased by a large measure. For example, two top Chinese universities, Peking University and Tsinghua University, published 70 and 32 papers, respectively, in international journals in the social sciences, while six other universities together with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences had another 105 papers in the social sciences published at the international level (“06 nian”). These 200-odd international papers represent a large increase compared with the case some 20 years ago. However, it is still clear, as R. Yang (2003, p. 188) rightly pointed out, that “China’s scholars in the humanities and social sciences have achieved far less international visibility than their colleagues in engineering and natural sciences.”

Internationalization of Chinese higher education and controversies over English versus Chinese

In Chinese higher education the trend toward internationalization was initiated in the mid-1980s, when the central government started to promulgate a series of documents concerned with higher education reform. These reports had a great impact and were influential across all major universities in the country (e.g., Huang, 2007; Pan, 2006; R. Yang, 2002, 2003). The internationalization drive in the Chinese higher education sector is prominently manifested in the goal of the internationalization of the curriculum in some disciplines, on the one hand, and the privileging of international indices for measuring research output, on the other. On the former front, the emphasis has been on increasing English-medium instruction in subject areas that are viewed as most relevant to the country’s economic development, that is, biotechnology, information technology, finance, and law, but notably not including HSS disciplines (see e.g., Ministry of Education, 2001). On the latter front, the adoption of Western criteria in measuring the credibility of scholarly publications has, in practice, been translated into academics being encouraged – through bonus payment schemes – to publish in Western-based English-medium journals. Again this policy has been most rigorously enforced for the sciences, although encouragement is also offered in HSS disciplines through credit being given to journals included in the SSCI and A&HCI.

In contrast to this push toward English-medium instruction and publication, language planners in China are concerned about Chinese being “eroded” by English. In an interview published at the official website of the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE), Wang Dengfeng, Deputy Director of the State Language Commission and Director of the Language Use and Management Bureau, expressed such a concern when asked to comment on the tremendous popularity of English (known as “the craze for English”) in China. Wang argued that the emphasis should be on “learning the native language well and using it well, thinking in the native language and communicating in the native language,” as it is important to “protect Chinese culture, and protect the intactness and purity of the Chinese language and characters” (“Guojia”).

Thus at the official level can be seen a contrast between policy-makers involved in the internationalization of Chinese higher education, on the one hand (pushing toward English-medium instruction and publication), and language planners, on the other hand (insisting upon the primacy of Chinese in the educational realm). Apart from the governmental level, at the level of individual higher education institutions (HEIs) and academies, there have been factors deterring the use of English in teaching and publishing in some specific HSS disciplines. For example, Tsinghua University, while promoting English as a medium of instruction in many courses, avoided doing so in politics courses and other courses that are considered “channels for transmitting CPC [Communist Party of China]-defined central values,” in order to protect such values from “the influence of capitalist culture” (Pan, 2006, p. 258). A perception of the ideological implications of language choice also underlies the limited use of English among Chinese academics in the humanities, according to some. Analysing why English has taken a foothold in China with Chinese scientists, while academics in the humanities are, in their estimation, to some extent resistant to English, Wang and Zhao (2004) consider this to be “a reflection of the century-long tradition of separation,” where “the practical side of English as an instrument of science is highlighted and the ideological aspect of the language [which gets activated in liberal arts] is played down” (p. 73). The authors lament the fact that resistance to English, which is partly attributable to “cultural nationalism,” in their view, “makes liberal arts scholars in China’s universities virtually closed to the outside world” (p. 74). They call for the rejection of this attitude and an increase in the use of English, “the de facto international language,” as the medium of communication on the part of Chinese academics in the liberal arts. Such an approach would ensure, Wang and Zhao claim, that “globalization will not turn out to be mere westernization or Anglo-Americanization,” but that Chinese scholars will contribute “their share to globalization” (p. 75).
Not addressed by Wang and Zhao (2004) in their call for the increasing use of English, but highlighted by Ruan (2002), is the question of the English language competence of Chinese scholars. Starting from the view that China’s anglicists (who typically are located in the English Departments of universities) are academically under-prepared, Ruan goes so far as to argue that in order to remediate the situation it is necessary to restore the primary status of the native tongue in the training period of these academics. Just as Western sinologists study their subject courses in English and demonstrate a high level of scholarship through their writing in English, Ruan argues, China’s anglicists can rely on their native tongue for study and publication. Even English specialists, therefore, according to Ruan, should write in Chinese. While this suggestion of using less English might be surprising to many, it nevertheless highlights the problem of language proficiency if international publication is to be achieved. If anglicists are not prepared for writing in English, one might indeed wonder about the other disciplines.

Apart from such published controversies as the foregoing among the academics themselves over the desirability of using English in Chinese academia, a range of recent reports provides further data concerning Chinese academics’ attitudes toward the use of English. A series of ethnographic case studies conducted by Li (2006a,b, 2007) highlighted Chinese novice scientists’ struggle with English writing. Reports by Shi (2002, 2003) of the publication profiles of a group of Western-trained Chinese TESOL professionals revealed a devotion to domestic Chinese-medium publication. On the other hand, the testimonies of Braine (2005) and Canagarajah (2008) in their capacities as the editors of Asian Journal of English Language Teaching and TESOL Quarterly, respectively, have demonstrated a growing enthusiasm among Chinese TESOL professionals to submit English papers for publication in journals outside China.

In light of these conflicting controversies and reports, a more in-depth study of the implications of the linguistic medium of publication for Chinese scholars across HSS disciplines is timely. The present study, which is part of a larger project that investigates the approaches and attitudes of Chinese academics toward research and publication, thus intends to contribute toward the fulfilment of this goal.

The study

In view of the literature background and contextual description provided above, the present study aims to address the following questions:

1. How and to what extent is English used among a sample of Chinese HSS academics?
2. What are the attitudes of these academics toward the official policy of encouraging more international publication (in English)?

Research site

A comprehensive research-based elite university (hereafter pseudonym CU) located in East China was chosen as the site of investigation, for two main reasons. Firstly, it is the Chinese Mainland university where the researchers have the most contacts, since it was the research site of previous research where work was conducted with academics in the university’s natural science disciplines (e.g., Flowerdew & Li, 2007; Li & Flowerdew, 2007). Secondly, the university, along with other elite universities in the country, has adopted the slogan of “internationalization” and the goal of “becoming a world-class university.” In particular, the university has recently set up a bonus payment scheme whereby it is stipulated that for each article published in overseas academic journals indexed by SSCI or A&HCI researchers will be awarded RMB3000 (approximately USD400), an amount that is the same as that awarded to an article published in the top domestic social science journal, Zhongguo Shehui Kexue [Social Sciences in China]. By contrast, each article published in other designated domestic journals receives much less (“first-class key journals” are rewarded with RMB1000 (approximately USD140) and those in a Chinese Social Science Citation Index (CSSCI) journal receive RMB200 (approximately USD28)). The prestige accorded to SSCI/A&HCI publications in this bonus scheme is thus clear.

2 The CSSCI is a database of a selection of relatively prestigious journals of the humanities and social sciences in China (see Su, Han, & Han, 2001). Annual adjustment is made to the journals indexed in the database; 493 journals were included in CSSCI in 2006.
The participants

The research participants of this study are drawn from CU’s academics across a range of HSS disciplines. Pilot interviews aimed at discovering potential issues of relevance were conducted between May and July 2007 with a few acquaintances who are professors in several HSS departments at CU. Then between September 2007 and January 2008 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 academics at CU. The participants were contacted as a result of a combination of two procedures: (1) through the recommendation of friends, the person would be emailed first to explain the purpose of the research and request an interview appointment; (2) a selection would be made after viewing academics’ web pages in the various HSS departments/schools of CU. Criteria for inclusion in the sample included the potential participants’ age, discipline, and level of research productivity. The aim was to get a good cross-section of HSS scholars, although only academics considered to be research-active were included. The personal information regarding the participants is listed in Table 1.

All 20 participants (four female) hold a PhD. Seven of them are in their 30s, five in their 40s, six in their 50s, and two in their 60s. Most have overseas experience, mainly in the form of short universities in America, Europe, Hong Kong, Japan, or Korea. P6, P7, P11, and P17 (the first three in the English Department) – hold a PhD from a Hong Kong (P6), UK (P7 and P17), or US (P11) university. These four, together with P12 (also in the English Department), and P13, are able to write independently in English for academic purposes. P13 has prolonged study and research experience in the recently delivered a speech in English at a university in Europe. In addition, P14, a professor of philosophy near to retirement, has co-authored a paper in English with a native speaker of English (getting editorial support from the latter) and has also on a number of occasions presented papers or communicated with overseas colleagues in English at international conferences. The rest, who are in various other HSS disciplines, generally have not had the experience of academic publication in English.

The interviews

Descriptive and open-ended questions were used as the initial questions to provide a framework for participants to reflect upon their experience of involvement with English in their academic life and their perception of the opportunities and constraints for their scholarly endeavors in the context of academic internationalization. The framing questions, designed to address the two research questions, as presented above, were the following:

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Political science</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Political science</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Social studies</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Social studies</td>
<td>Early 50s</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Mid-50s</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Comparative literature</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Foreign literature</td>
<td>Mid-50s</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Foreign literature</td>
<td>Late 50s</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Chinese linguistics</td>
<td>Mid-60s</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>Chinese linguistics</td>
<td>Mid-40s</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>Applied linguistics</td>
<td>Late 50s</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12</td>
<td>Applied linguistics</td>
<td>Early 40s</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P13</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>Professor</td>
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<tr>
<td>P14</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>Early 60s</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P15</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Mid-30s</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P16</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Late 50s</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P17</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Mid-40s</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P18</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P19</td>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Early 50s</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P20</td>
<td>Business management</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Can you describe the role of English in your academic life?
What are some of the opportunities and constraints for your academic work here with regard to Chinese and English?
What do you think of the university’s SSCI/A&HCI encouragement policy?
What do you think of the current situation and the future of Chinese scholars participating in international academia?

Each of these questions, and their follow-up questions, was designed to encourage participants to relate situations and stories that they deemed to be relevant to their engagement with English and Chinese. The questions, as given above, do not necessarily match the order asked during the interview, varying according to different participants. In addition, specific questions were asked to elicit information of particular relevance to particular disciplines and individual participants. A common feature of the interviews was contrastive questions (Spradley, 1979), such as “Scholars in some disciplines said it is not realistic to try to publish in English; what do you think of this view?” and “Some talked of separate discourse communities between China and the West in their disciplines; what is it like in your discipline?”. The interviews, depending on circumstances, generally lasted about an hour, mostly taking place in the offices of the participants. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin by the Chinese researcher, recorded digitally, and later transcribed and translated into English.

While acknowledging the problematization of interview data in the literature – that such data is co-constructed by the interviewer and the interviewee in interaction (Block, 2000; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002) – it is argued here that the interview data of this study are sufficiently reliable for the research purpose for which it is intended. In the present study the interviewer played the role of a facilitator who let the research participants lead the way. As is clear from the interview transcripts, the academic participants (perhaps due to their skill in verbalizing their intellectual thinking) consistently took control of the interviews. And insofar as the research participants’ perception of their relationship to the interviewer may have an effect on what accounts they give (Silverman, 2002), in the present study the interviewer’s status of being both an “insider” (having taught at CU previously and thus encouraging a spirit of collegiality) and an “outsider” (not being familiar, in most cases, with the research participants’ disciplines) promoted candid and straightforward expression of attitudes and views on the part of the research participants.

In analysing the interview data the two researchers worked collaboratively and followed the procedures of analytic induction (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) and constant comparison (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researchers were aligned with the spirit of not viewing interview data as representational (of reality), but as presentational (as bearing upon “issues related to the presentation of self”) (Block, 2000, p. 758). Thus particular attention was paid to the diverging attitudes and views voiced by the individuals of different disciplinary backgrounds, without making true or false judgement against a presumed “reality.”

Findings

Research question 1: How and to what extent is English used among a sample of Chinese HSS academics?

As the following findings will show, the participants reported using English a great deal for reading, but to a lesser extent for writing. The importance of learning English and of writing and publishing in that language is acknowledged, but a lack of adequate proficiency is seen as a major barrier to being able to write for publication in English.

Reading and accessing English specialist literature

The most important role of English in academic life for the participants was related, to varying degrees, to the reading of English specialist literature. For several young academics – P1 (political science), P5 (psychology), P18 (education), P20 (business management) – as well the more mature P13 (Western philosophy) — and, not surprisingly, a few in the English department (P6, P7, P11, and P12), English specialist literature is their primary source of reading. For example, P18 said that for his own study the literature he uses is almost always in English; only the textbooks he uses for teaching undergraduates are in Chinese.

Apart from those in a few humanities subjects (history, philosophy, and foreign literature), the English resources read by the academics are primarily journal articles that can be downloaded from various databases through the university’s libraries. Nevertheless, the participants pointed out that in addition to the unavailability of e-books (which
are not supported by the university), some specialized databases are not purchased by the university either. This problem is solved by seeking help from friends outside China. P18, for example, turns to friends in Hong Kong for journals which are not available in his home university, while P5 has a friend in a North American University who makes her library account available. Despite the varying degrees of reading English literature and some limitations in being able to access it, reading and accessing English materials does seem to be common in the participants’ academic life. While to some extent such “non-discursive” (Canagarajah, 1996) barriers as the limit upon access to specialist literature still exists for the Chinese academics, availability of electronic databases that enable access to many domestic and overseas specialist journals is substantially alleviating the problem.

Importance attached to learning English and to writing and publishing in English

The majority of the participants did not find it particularly necessary or feasible to write and publish in English. It is noticeable, however, that a sizable minority either believed that it is important to publish in English or indicated that they hoped to do so someday. These positive attitudes are the focus in this section; negative attitudes (which were due to various constraints) will be presented in the next section.

P9, a mature professor of Chinese linguistics who studied Russian during his college years in the 1960s and for whom reading and writing is almost always in Chinese, noted that he had been self-studying English on an ongoing basis for decades. Whenever necessary or possible he would try to write (with editorial assistance in terms of language correction at a later stage) an English abstract of his articles on classical Chinese phonology and philology. These articles are published in reputable domestic journals where English abstracts for articles are now generally required. The persistence and diligence of this participant – who had not had an opportunity to study English as a student but had lived with the growing importance of English in China from the 1960s (Lam, 2002) – is perhaps not atypical of many Chinese academics of his generation. P16, a professor of history, a few years younger than P9, reported listening to Voice of America every day to learn English in the 1980s when he was studying for a master’s degree. (Interestingly, this is exactly what another Chinese professor of history also did every day, as mentioned by Townsend (2003) in a field report following a visit to a university in northern China.)

P7, a professor of foreign literature in the English Department, is a strong advocate for the importance of Chinese academics’ work being presented in English:

We should walk from the local to the global level - with a foothold in China and walk to the world. The Chinese academic circle - you can’t say it’s isolated from the outside world, but you can say that it’s not doing well in terms of connecting to the international academia. In the present globalization context, the circulation and creation of knowledge is mostly in the hands of Westerners. The Chinese are also very intelligent and should participate in the process. So I hope to do something to push Chinese scholars to walk to the world. (P7)

Indeed, P7 has been practicing his belief by collaborating with an overseas press on a project concerned with the translation of Chinese scholars’ articles into English for publication in edited collections. P20, in business management, is another strong voice in supporting the need to publish in English. P20 believes there to be a good opportunity for Chinese researchers to publish at the international level because the world is interested in China:

The Chinese economy is growing so well, there are definitely some phenomena that are very interesting. And there are many issues in management that deserve our thinking. And what we produce also deserves to be learned by others. People will think, something produced in this context of quick economic growth, there must be something useful in it. (P20)

P20 is in the process of conducting research projects from which he expects to derive a couple of papers in English. These will be his first papers in that language. P5 and P18, young academics who read primarily in English, although not yet writing in that language, nevertheless indicated that this is definitely part of their plan in the coming years. P5, in psychology, for example, plans to design some experiments and write them up for publication in English. She is collaborating with some overseas academics in the area of cross-cultural research.

In general, even though the amount of actual publishing in English is minimal, it seems clear that the Chinese academics take seriously the learning of English and that they believe that Chinese HSS scholars have something to offer the international community, with the younger academics particularly aspiring to publish in English someday.
The English barrier as a constraint on publishing in English

If there is little writing for publication going on in English the question arises as to what the reasons might be. There are a number of constraints shared by various members of the research sample, difficulty with English being the one most commonly cited by the participants. P1, a young associate professor in political science, stated that although she has no difficulty with reading research articles in English, writing for publication in English was beyond her. Two mature professors, P8 (foreign literature in the Chinese Department) and P16 (Chinese history), had similar comments. P8 stated that he was aware of his mistakes and unidiomatic English. He avoided writing in English because he was afraid of being laughed at. P16 felt that he was perhaps too old to master written English at a level good enough for publication. The younger generation would perhaps be able to do it better, he felt.

The role of translation was commented upon by a number of participants. P16 noted that he had asked foreign friends on a couple of occasions to help him with translation when he had to present his work in English for exchange with overseas colleagues. Yet for P19 (law) and P13 (philosophy), translation is not a good solution. For P19 there will always be a gap between the translated and original texts. P13 commented similarly, as follows:

Translation cannot build the bridge. Though it may make you feel that it seems we’re together, in fact the real exchange of thoughts is very hard for translation to convey. (P13)

This view of the inadequacy of translation contrasts with the action of P7 (foreign literature) who, as noted in the previous section, was actually coordinating a project involving translation of papers authored by Chinese scholars in the humanities into English.

Those younger academics who said publishing in English is in their plans for the near future are optimistic that the English barrier can be overcome. This can be done, they believed, by using an English journal article as a template (P5), by collaborating with overseas colleagues (P5, P18, P20), or by training young students to be strong in English to solve the problem in the long run (P20). The language barrier is seen as less of a problem for these academics. This optimistic view was expressed by P20 as follows:

Language polishing is not the most important in the whole process of scientific research. This can be packaged – we can train students with good language, or collaborate with overseas colleagues – if you have a very interesting idea, they will be very happy to help. (P20)

Overall, it seems those participants who do not have a particularly strong feeling for writing in English see it as a big barrier (where translation is perhaps of only limited use), while those who strongly aspire to publish in English are a lot more optimistic about finding ways to overcome the language barrier. However, as noted in the previous section, the fact is that little writing is currently being done for publication in English.

Research question 2: What are the attitudes of these academics toward the official policy of encouraging more international publication (in English)?

As reported in Section 2 (“Context”) of this paper, there is official encouragement to publish in English and, as has been indicated in the previous section, there is a certain amount of enthusiasm to publish in that language. However, the interview data show that as well as support there is resistance to this official policy of more publication in English. Indeed, the interview data exhibit a number of examples of expressions of support for the policy presented as a mere preface to the introduction of negative opinions. Resistance may be based on a number of arguments, including assessment criteria encouraging publication in Chinese, the fact that Chinese and international (Anglo-American) academia belong to separate discourse communities, a desire to avoid pandering to “orientalist” discourses, and resistance towards the “internationalizing” implications of the government policy.

Assessment procedures encouraging a preference for Chinese publication

Apart from the language barrier, participants across the disciplines frequently cited the current assessment pressure, in spite of the official policy, as a factor deterring them from trying to write in English. This is true even for those who have had overseas education experience or are capable of academic writing in English (P6, P7, P11, P12, P13, and P17). P11’s comment is typical:
The domestic assessment system, to some extent, actually does not encourage one to publish abroad, even though it is said it counts. In general people’s energy is focused on publishing in domestic journals (P11).

This is because, although certain international journals are listed by departments as being meritorious and there are financial rewards for publishing in such journals, it is easier to publish in the (much more numerous) Chinese language journals which are also listed. Even those younger academics who aspire or plan to publish in English some day see that as a goal in the future. For the time being, their focus is to “be visible” (P18) as early as possible, to establish a reputation, and to achieve a higher academic rank through domestic publication. As stated by P2:

If I pursue English writing, then a lot of my time and energy will be put into this! For example, if I publish an SSCI paper in English, say, I’ll spend two years; these two years if I use them for CSSCI publication, I can probably publish 5–10 papers, and these 5–10 papers will enable me to be promoted to associate professorship or professorship, while if I only have one SSCI paper, it cannot help me to achieve that goal. (P2)

P13, who has had prolonged overseas experience and has presented papers in English at international conferences, remarked:

Writing an English paper, you have to spend much more time than Chinese. And the pressure from projects – the pressure of finishing a project and reporting on it–makes it impossible for you to spend a lot of time writing something that is not recognized or not given a high credit. (P13)

And for P7 (foreign literature), the participant reported earlier who was leading a project concerned with translating Chinese scholars’ articles into English, publishing in English was much less of a goal than publishing in Chinese. Similarly, for his colleagues in the English Department, who are capable of independent academic writing in English (P6, P11, and P12), publication in English is not a priority. P10 (Chinese linguistics), who heads the Chinese Department, pointed out explicitly that publishing in English is beyond the department’s current main concern, which is to have enough departmental outputs (in Chinese) so that the department can maintain its status of being a home-base of several “key disciplines” at the national level.

Notably, P10 also observed that in his discipline mastering the texts composed in classical Chinese – “also a foreign language in a sense,” as he put it – requires such an enormous amount of investment of time that if one aims for being able to write for publication in English, then no time would be left for one to be versed in the subject matter encoded in classical Chinese. This additional amount of time that peripheral scholars have to invest in order to read, write, and do research in English has been well acknowledged in the literature (e.g., Ammon, 2001; Durand, 2006; Swales, 1990; van Dijk, 1994). For the participants in the present study, for whom efficient accommodation to the assessment seems to be a paramount concern, publishing in Chinese rather than making hard efforts to learn to write in English, is certainly their immediate commitment.

Chinese and Western academia as separate discourse communities

A comment made, with varying degrees of emphasis, by many of the participants (P1–P3, P5–P7, P10, P11, P13, P14, P16, P18–P20) is that Chinese and Western academia represent separate paradigms, or discourse communities (Kuhn, 1970; Swales, 1990). The separation is first seen in terms of the issues being studied:

Many issues in China can’t be taken to the international arena to study, as the issues do not exist at the international level. For example we want to propose that China’s single-child policy must be adjusted. . . But in other countries, the right of birth is a basic human right. They may discuss the right of birth in the realm of private rights; but in our country, the right of birth is not presumed. (P3)

My observation at such [international] conferences is each follows their own way. Western scholars are talking about theirs, we Chinese scholars talking about ours. It seems hard to form a real discussion of views. The issues they are concerned with and the methods they use are different. (P1)

The separation, as mentioned in this second quotation, is also seen methodologically. The Chinese paradigm, as seen through the domestic journal articles, is often characterized by non-empirical, reflective thinking on macroscopic issues and aimed at proposing grand models (P1, P14, P17–P20):
There’s too much theoretical and reflection-oriented talk in China in the past. Western research has increasingly taken a scientific path. The scientific rationality has been part of the research process. Any research is based on evidence. As I read Western papers, I see they all take methodology, empirical data seriously. Even their qualitative research is also based on data. I think this paradigm is a challenge to Chinese scholars. (P18)

While it is generally proposed among the participants that this reflective emphasis on macro-issues on the part of Chinese HSS scholars indicates an overall lack of empiricism in the Chinese research tradition in many disciplines (Gao, Li, & Liu, 2001, for instance, have pointed out the same problem with the traditional applied linguistics research in China), for P1 (political science), it is very much a paradigm of “proposing grand solutions for problems,” attributable to a deep-rooted ideology among Chinese scholars “to save the country”:

Many scholars have a psychology of ‘jing shi jiu guo’ [manage the world and save the country] – they hope their research has a certain effect on the country. In China, generations of scholars have always had this thought – I want to save the country from fire and water. To me this mentality is not good for the accumulation of knowledge. (P1)

P1’s remark on the patriotic orientation among Chinese scholars seems to echo Agelasto and Adamson’s (1998) observation (with reference to research published in education journals in China) that “Mainland [Chinese] scholars still do not feel free to analyze, much less criticize, state policies on which the government holds strong views. Once a policy goes out of favor academics rush in to offer their opinions.” (p. 413)

For P19 (law), the desire among Chinese scholars to be politically correct in the “ideological framework of Marxism” likewise impinges upon their research, and a re-orientation to SSCI may actually have a “cathartic” effect on the deep-rooted ideology. This view is backed up by the following anecdote:

I heard that at an oral defense of a PhD dissertation at a university, since the dissertation did not use Marxism-Engelsism stuff, the student was not allowed to participate in the oral defense. When preparing the final report of a project, there’s also this problem [the feeling of a need to connect to Marxism]. (P19)

R. Yang (2005, p. 188) has pointed out that “discrepant ideologies, paradigms and discourses” of China with the West in HSS have led to “far less common exchanges” between the two than the case in science, engineering, and technology. For P19, cited above, then, aiming at SSCI can be a way of reducing the discrepancies and eventually facilitating exchanges between China and the West.

The current discrepancies mean in general that China is perceived as lagging behind and that as a consequence Chinese scholars are not yet ready to publish internationally:

In China education research lags at least 20 years behind the research overseas. (P18)

The reason Chinese scholars still have few SSCI papers published, I think it’s we’re not sufficiently following up on the international research. (P5)

Why do only a few get published abroad? One is unfamiliarity with the paradigm abroad. You don’t have the right to engage in conversation with them. (P14)

In China our target readership is still the domestic audience. Western studies, especially the study of Western philosophy, is still at a stage of digestion and absorption, not yet at a stage of creation. So this implies that we’re not yet on an equal footing to engage in dialogue with international peers, in English. (P13)

It is worth noting that the above views resonate with the results of extensive interviews with academics across China by R. Yang (2003, 2005).

In contrast to the above negative views regarding conflicting discourse communities, it is also worth noting that several participants, in more locally based fields, did not see such a split. For example, P9, in Chinese linguistics, pointed out that Chinese scholarship in the Qing dynasty during the 18–19th century already contained elements of empiricism originating in the West. In addition, some participants saw positive advantages in separate paradigms (P16 and P10). P16 (Chinese history), for example, emphasized the strength of historical research being done by Chinese scholars:

I don’t believe Americans can do better research than Chinese on Chinese history. I don’t believe it even if you beat me to death (colloquialism) [with laughter]. . . .It’s not just language; there’s also culture. There’s some kind
of comprehension beyond language. History may have left in your memory some understanding or information which we may not have realized. (P16)

P10 (Chinese linguistics) suggested the difference between Chinese and Western scholarship is good for “cultural plurality,” and that publication through different linguistic media actually helps to maintain the plurality:

Keeping a distance may be a good thing. While we’re having economic globalization, culture should be plural, otherwise individuality is lost. There should be difference and absence of mutual understanding – to be followed by communication. (P10)

P15 (Chinese history), who specializes in the histories of various localities in China, felt it is perhaps not necessary for the researchers in her field to try to write in English because few Western scholars would be interested in their subject matter.

Overall, it seems some participants felt that the separation between China and the West in terms of the discourse of research means China is lagging behind and the separation is a barrier for Chinese scholars to try to get published internationally. Participants in more locally based disciplines, on the other hand, were more positive about both Chinese scholarship and the prospect of Chinese scholars’ publishing their research in Chinese.

A desire to avoid pandering to “orientalist discourse”

P10’s views, reported above, on the value of maintaining cultural difference have a bearing upon his critical perspective about which work from China might normally get published in a Western journal:

Even if it’s written in English, you may not get published, because they don’t believe you can do superior research, say, on Shakespearean study. But a report on “Shakespeare study in China in the past five years” may get published, because they may want to know the situation in China. (P10)

P6 (comparative literature) more explicitly referred to an “orientalist discourse” (Said, 1978):

I think on the whole they [the journals in the Anglophone center] have – to put it unpleasantly – an “orientalist discourse.” They don’t want to see the real China, they want to see China through their “orientalist discourse,” to see a China that they want to see, for instance “bloody, negative” China, they want to see this... To follow internationalization, you need to cater to their interest, through self-colonialism. (P6)

P6 perceived a challenge in having to follow the “publication rules” of the centre. She found it impossible to conform to what she perceived to be the centre’s refusal to see “the real China” (see also Zhang, 2002), thus a few years after her return to the Mainland from Hong Kong, where she obtained her PhD, she gave up attempting publication in centre journals.

It should be noted, however, that no other participants expressed a view similar to that of P6 and P10, who in effect suggested that Chinese scholars are peripheralized and Chinese scholarship is misrepresented in the international academy.

Resistance towards the “internationalizing” implications of the government policy

The bonus scheme at the participants’ university of awarding RMB3000 for every SSCI or A&HCI paper, as noted earlier, indicates a clear privilege accorded to such publications in comparison with domestic publications.³ There is both acknowledgement of the positive value of this policy among the research participants and skepticism towards it. P3 said it is good that an “international” standard is used as a reference point:

We have been always emphasizing connecting to the international and building a first-class world university or high-level university. You can’t close up the door and compare with yourself, but should step out of China and

³ At the time of assessment, as indicated by anecdotal evidence, favorable policies on international publication – now increasingly coming out in Chinese universities – tend to translate into a formal point system whereby an internationally published English paper is given more points than a domestic paper. China is not unique in doing this. Curry and Lillis (2004) have reported a surprisingly similar formal point system practised in the context of the psychology departments in Slovakia.
compare in an international perspective. The criteria should not be made by yourself; it should be something widely accepted and endorsed. (P3)

This support for the university’s adoption of “widely accepted and endorsed” criteria was shared among several participants when focusing on the positive side of the reward policy. In addition, P9, P18, P19, and P20 also pointed out that the university’s policy has a “leading” effect, by giving a clear signal to its staff about its favored working priorities.

However, as previously mentioned, among a number of the participants, an acknowledgment of the advantages of the policy occurs as a mere preface to reservation or criticism on the part of the interviewed academics. P14, an established professor of philosophy, for example, did not find the incentive of bonus payments tempting. He prefers to reach a big audience by publishing in a reputable domestic journal:

Some time ago they gave me a project, a big one from the Ministry of Education, and told me the final goal is – for me alone, RMB200,000 [approximately USD30,000]! You publish an article abroad, as too few articles are published from our circle! RMB200,000 – publish one article with Springer will do! I did not agree to take up the project. … At my age, my interest is not to publish a paper with Springer. They said I should try to publish a collection of writings with Springer. I asked back: publish with Springer and so what? What I’m interested in is Renmin Jiaoyu [People’s Education]. It is not a “key” journal in my field. But it has a circulation of 170,000. So I’m happy to do it – I can do something useful. (P14)

P20 (business management), echoing comments reported earlier about the need for extra time, claimed that the university’s monetary reward for an SSCI paper is too little, since such a paper would necessitate investment of a tremendous amount of hard work:

A paper published in a top journal in management, from design to writing, it’ll probably take 7–8 years. So much toil, only equal to RMB3000? Of course it’s not right! (P20)

Further critical attitudes toward the privilege given to the SSCI/A&HCI publication are also to be found in the interview data. For P16, the privilege implies a hegemony of the criteria in science over other disciplines:

The university’s use of those indices – in fact I do not entirely agree with that. It is OK in science; it is also possible in social science, but the humanities – is it possible to give an absolute yardstick? (P16)

And for P10 (Chinese linguistics), the privilege represents a hegemony of Western criteria over Chinese academia; and in his opinion, putting emphasis upon Chinese scholars publishing in English is as “ridiculous” as insisting upon Western researchers (including sinologists) publishing in Chinese.

P10’s view echoes that of some Chinese scholars in the literature who have pointed out that the prestige attached to Western indices is a manifestation of “post-colonialism” bound up with commercial interests (Gu, 2007; Y. Yang, 2007). For example, Y. Yang (2007, p. 22) observed that “In the Chinese context, the SCI- and SSCI-zation of academic assessment, while justified to some extent in applying ‘scientific’ standards, is also a form of reproduction of overseas standards and there is a factor of commercial monopoly.”

Discussion

In the previous sections findings have been presented that address the two research questions of this study, that is, the extent to which English is used in the participants’ academic life and the attitudes of the participants toward the official policy of encouraging more international publication (in English). Given the relatively small size of the sample, it is not possible to present a conclusive summary of the participants’ views, taking account of such variables as age, discipline, or educational background. One thing that is clear, however, is that most of the scholars included in the sample have read extensively in English, although those in more locally based disciplines read more in Chinese than do those in the more universal disciplines. It does also appear that those who have an enthusiasm for English publication tend to be the younger academics (especially those in disciplines that are not particularly locally bound). However, due to pressure from assessment criteria and/or the language barrier, even this group, in common with their other colleagues, does little writing in English. Even those who might be expected to do a part of their writing in English – because they are in the English Department (P6, P7, P11, and
P12) or because they have had previous overseas education experience (P6, P7, P11, P13, and P17) – prioritize
Chinese over English.

As regards the second of the two research questions of this study, attitudes towards the authorities’ encouragement
of international publication (in English), while most participants acknowledged the strength of an “international
standard,” there are negative attitudes towards this policy arising from a number of factors, including a perceived clash
between Chinese and Western discourse communities, a (minority) perception of a tendency towards “orientalism” on
the part of Western editors, the satisfaction one may derive from reaching a large audience through domestic
publication (which even a big sum of monetary reward for international publication cannot substitute), and the
questionable logic underlying the bonus scheme (i.e., the immeasurable effort that one puts into conducting research
and preparing an SSCI paper being credited with a limited sum of money), and the idea of Chinese humanities scholars
being evaluated on the basis of Western criteria such as SSCI and A&HCI.

If the relatively small sample used in this study can be taken as indicative, it would appear that English is still far from
becoming the preferred language of research and publication for Chinese HSS scholars and that this is likely to remain the
case for some years to come. Compared with the case in some other Expanding Circle countries (Kachru, 1985) where
English is used to various extents together with the native tongue in publication (see e.g., Petersen and Shaw (2002) for
Denmark; Berg et al. (2001) for Sweden; and Ammon (1998) for Germany), English is still used less overall by the
Chinese HSS participants in the present study. In spite of enthusiasm, particularly on the part of some younger scholars in
the less locally based disciplines, this situation may in no small part be due to the considerable skepticism towards and
indeed outright criticism of the government’s goal of more international publication (in English).

An influential theory relates the use of a language for international communication to gross domestic product
(GDP) (Graddol, 2006). Insofar as GDP has been claimed as a reliable index for the power of the language connected
to it, it can be seen that it has been projected that in 2010, while English may account for 28.2% of the global economy
(GDP), Chinese will likely not be far behind, standing at 22.8% (Davis, 2003). By 2050, according to Graddol (2006),
China is projected to be number one of the top ten economies in the world, while the two Anglophone countries in the
top ten, USA and UK, will take second and seventh places, respectively. If GDP is indeed a good measure of the power
of a language, it follows that the role of Chinese, including Chinese as the language of publication in HSS, will
certainly not decrease.

Conflicting with this overall trend, however, there are other forces affecting the choice of language for publication
among HSS scholars. These forces might lead, in the medium term at least, to greater visibility of Chinese HSS
scholars in international publication (in English). Firstly, against the current backdrop of internationalization of
scholarship, as noted in this study, Chinese academics (especially the younger generation), assisted no doubt by
scholars returning from study overseas, are starting to embrace Western conventions, research issues, and
methodology. The ideological gap separating Chinese and Western scholarship may therefore be reduced. Secondly, in
the general trend of a continuous increase of expenditure on research and development (R&D) activities4 and as China
becomes increasingly aware of the gap with the international standard in the realm of HSS, growing emphasis will be
placed upon R&D in the HSS sphere. This gap was already acknowledged in a government document promulgated in
1999 (Ministry of Education, 1999), a document which, according to R. Yang (2003, pp. 187–188), is expected to have
“an enormous impact in China on the humanities and social sciences in the years to come.” Further government
financial resources are thus likely to be devoted to encourage international publication in HSS. There remains the
language barrier, of course, but this is beyond the scope of this study (although see e.g., Flowerdew & Li, 2007;
Burrough-Boenisch, 2003; Cargill & O’Connor, 2006; Kaplan & Baldauf, 2005 for discussion of measures for
improving levels of English for publication).

Conclusion

According to some of the participants in this study at least, for ideological reasons (clash of discourse communities,
orientalism of Western editors), the low visibility of Chinese HSS scholarship on the international scene, as pointed to
erlier, might not be a bad thing. In addition, as claimed by language planners, greater publication in English might be

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4 In 2006 China’s expenditure on R&D was worth RMB294.3 billion (approximately USD39 billion), 20.1% more than 2005 and accounting for
1.41% of annual GDP (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2007).
at the expense of Chinese as an academic language. On the other hand, as Wang and Zhao (2004) point out (also referred to earlier), the benefits of globalization (which are taken here to include the dissemination of knowledge on a global scale) are neglected if international publication is shunned by Chinese scholars. By publishing in English, Chinese scholars benefit the international research community with new knowledge. But more than that, by shunning international publication in English these scholars, as Wang and Zhao also point out, are encouraging a process of globalization as Westernization. At the same time, it may be noted with Canagarajah (2002) that such a course of action is to establish a ghetto-like situation, with Chinese scholars cut off from the rest of the world. With sensitivity, therefore, it would seem that publication in English might be encouraged without either sacrificing ideological beliefs, on the one hand, or eroding Chinese as an academic language, on the other. This is not at the same time to deny the problem of bringing about an ideological shift on the part of some scholars, or overcoming the language barrier experienced by many Chinese HSS scholars when it comes to writing for publication in English.5

To facilitate visibility of scholarship in the periphery – including Chinese scholarship – in international academia, which has its “centre” in the Anglophone world (Galtung, 1971), efforts need to be made from both sides. Some possible ways may be considered to promote peripheral scholars’ participation in international academia, with particular reference to the Chinese scene.

Firstly, in line with the functional split of languages found elsewhere in the world in non-Anglophone settings (e.g., Burgess, 2002; Curry & Lillis, 2004; Petersen & Shaw, 2002), what some returned Chinese scholars are practicing, that is, Chinese publication for the local readership and English publication for the international one (Flowerdew & Li, 2008), may be instructive.

Secondly, dual publication of the same work in the native tongue and English has received positive responses among Chinese scholars recently (Wen & Gao, 2007). Just as the present paper was being finalized, a document was issued by the Office of Social Sciences, at CU, the research site for the present study, announcing that the university has launched a new journal (which will have an ISBN number and be distributed at home and overseas) tentatively entitled China Studies. In this journal, HSS academics are encouraged to have a Chinese article of theirs (already published domestically or not) translated into English and to submit it to the journal. If similar initiatives were to be initiated at other Chinese universities this would indeed be a step in the direction of greater participation of Chinese HSS scholars internationally.

The dominance of the centre-based journals has to a large extent been promoted by the high (perhaps too high) regard in the periphery for, centre-based indices such as SSCI and A&HCI. Thus thirdly, raising the visibility of peripheral scholarship calls for a de-centering of such indices, by including in the databases more journals from the periphery.6 Meanwhile, the electronic databases of journals and other resources at the local level should be given more prominence and made accessible at the international level.7

Finally, a preference for “orientalist” discourses, as some of the participants in this study perceive it, on the part of Western journals may be difficult to overcome. But dialogue would surely be more likely to bring about a change here than a shunning of these journals by peripheral scholars. With a greater number of submissions and discussion with editors and reviewers, it might be possible for Chinese HSS authors to “educate” such players in the publishing game and bring about a more sophisticated view on their part. Greater participation might also lead to Chinese HSS scholars becoming reviewers, editorial board members and indeed editors of some of these journals. This would really bring about a de-centering of these journals.

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5 As has been pointed out by various scholars, the language of research in HSS discipline tends to be more complex than the more formulaic language of the natural sciences (Flowerdew & Li, 2007; R. Yang, 2005; Zhong, 1998), which perhaps partially explains the higher publication rates in international publication on the part of the latter group.

6 Presently only one mainland Chinese journal is included in A&HCI. It is Waiguo wenxue yanjiu [Studies of Foreign Literature], which is published in mainland China from 1978 under the auspices of Central China Normal University, and entered A&HCI in 2007. Zhongguo shehui kexue (Chinese edition) and its English edition, Social Sciences in China, are both bimonthlies launched in 1980 under the auspices of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Their top status in China among all journals of social sciences notwithstanding, they are not indexed by SSCI.

7 In China, CSSCI is becoming increasingly influential. See Note 2.
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