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### Learning from China to internationalise Australian research education: pedagogies of intellectual equality and 'optimal ignorance' of ERA journal rankings

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## Learning from China to internationalise Australian research education: pedagogies of intellectual equality and ‘optimal ignorance’ of ERA journal rankings

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Chinese is now a global language because of the global flow of Chinese people throughout the world. This development provides an important intellectual basis for engaging in the transnational exchange of Chinese theoretical knowledge. The argument developed here is that learning from international (and migrant) research students from China is a way to internationalise Australian research education programs. Rancière’s concept of ‘ignorance of inequality’ informs the *pedagogies of intellectual equality* reported here by providing an interruption to the prevailing sense and sensibilities of research education. Chinese doctoral students’ analysis of Australian research policy verifies the presumption that they are capable of scholarly argumentation using Chinese theoretical tools.

随着中国人口在全世界的流动,汉语已经成为一门世界语言,这给在全世界范围内应用中国的理论知识提供了智力基础。本文提出,通过向来自中国的国际(以及移民)研究生们学习,澳洲可以促进其高等教育的国际化。借鉴 Rancière (1991) 关于教育不平等的理论,本文提出了一个新的概念:生成平等教育法,该方法被用来质疑西方研究生教育中的一些惯例。来自中国的博士研究生们对于澳洲政府关于学术研究政策的批判分析证明,他们有能力应用中国的理论知识进行学术研究。

**Keywords:** Chinese theoretical tools; cultural difference; doctoral education; Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA); journal rankings; optimal ignorance; pedagogies of intellectual equality; supervision

### Introduction

Marginson (2004) argues that efforts to internationalise research education based solely on English are failing to meet the educational demands of Asia-Pacific nations. Anglophone nations such as Australia might enhance their export capacity through customised linguistic provision. To explore this proposition further, it is necessary to clarify several key terms. ‘Internationalising research education’ does not have an uncontested unitary definition (Haigh, 2009; Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005). In this article, the internationalisation of Australian doctoral education is defined as extending and deepening the capabilities of research students from China to use Chinese theoretical tools in their research into Australian education. Such tools include metaphors, conceptual categories and/or images (Turner, 2010). More broadly, this definition moves away from neglecting non-Western theories, or

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ghettoising them as ‘exotica’ (Acharya & Buzan, 2007; Alatas, 2006), to establishing them as a normal feature for internationalising Australian research education.

In the scholarly literature, ‘Anglophone’ refers to the world’s diversity of monolingual English speakers such as ‘Anglophone Caribbean immigrant women’ (Alfred, 2003) and ‘Anglophone French-as-a-second-language teacher candidates [in Canada]’ (Bayliss & Vignola, 2007). Here, ‘Anglophone’ is seen relationally, as by Marginson (2004, p. 111): ‘Leaving Asia-Pacific nations “hanging on the Anglophone” is to decisively limit the cross-border possibilities.’ Zhou, Knoke and Sakamoto (2005, p. 304, italics in original) are also concerned about the ‘*linguistic and cultural disparity in knowledge production, dissemination and validation*’ due to a lack of relational understanding in English-only research education.

This article argues that Anglophone research supervisors and other educators in Australia who do not know Chinese theories, particularly those in the humanities and social sciences, can still have students from China produce scholarly arguments using Chinese metaphors, concepts and images. In this way they can make learning from China integral to defining the internationalisation of Australian research education. The term ‘Chinese theoretical tools’ has no categorical purity but is contested and, therefore fluid and heterogeneous. China’s transnational knowledge connections span the centuries (Goody, 2010; Hobson, 2004) and have produced ‘radical heterogeneity’ (Agrawal, 1995, p. 421) in both Chinese theoretical tools and the theories used in Australia. They are not separate homogeneous categories.

The idea of internationalising education is variously constructed. This article adds to that complexity by defining the internationalisation of Australian research education as learning from China (and, by implication, from other countries from where Australia recruits its international and migrant students). It provides an analysis of pedagogies of intellectual equality as a vehicle for developing intellectual relations with China by offering an account of Chinese research students’ uses of Chinese theoretical tools to analyse evidence of Australian education and develop their scholarly arguments. And, given that research publications are a measure of research students’ original contribution to knowledge and their productivity, the final section focuses on their analysis of Australia’s journal ranking policy.

### **Learning from China to internationalise Australian research education**

For some, internationalisation of research education means mining foreign sites for data, while for others it is an actually-existing-presence in disciplines claiming to be universal (Connell, 2007). Still others see ‘internationalisation’ as government and university commodification of English and Western knowledge into an export industry (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008). Zhou, Knoke and Sakamoto (2005, p. 303) argue that the ‘Eurocentric knowledge framework’ of internationalisation means ‘a unidirectional perspective of cultural difference or cultural unfamiliarity is emphasised (i.e. the unfamiliarity of Chinese students with Western culture/knowledge).’

There is limited research in international education that addresses ‘the kinds of knowledge that readily travels, the knowledge that most and least requires or benefits from travel, how knowledge travels or why it travels in the manner that it does’ (Kenway & Fahey, 2007, p. 171). Although Chinese theoretical knowledge is not addressed in Connell’s (2007) argument for making intellectual connections across ‘peripheral’ nations, that argument gives grounds for theoretically-driven

engagements between Australia and China (Singh, 2009, 2010). While an absence of Southern theoretical tools undermines the robustness of Connell's argument for internationalising doctoral education programs and pedagogies, scholars from China (Qin, 2007), India (Acharya & Buzan, 2007), Japan (Inoguchi, 2007) and Singapore (Alatas, 2006) do provide resources for theorising internationalisation. Connell's (2007) limited timeframe also provides little scope for exploring the centuries of alternating knowledge flows between South/North and East/West (Blaut, 1993; Goody, 2010; Hobson, 2004), thus her argument gives little attention to the 'non-Western' concepts already built into 'Western' theories (Bilgin, 2008) over time (as will be discussed below).

Currently, so-called Western research communities are seen as the sources for the world's new knowledge (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2004). The internationalisation of Western education is a key vehicle for diffusing this knowledge into non-Western countries (Alatas, 2006). Working within this 'Eurocentric diffusionist' framework, Western universities assume that this will continue indefinitely (Blaut, 1993). Zhou, Knoke and Sakamoto (2005, p. 299) found that 'indifference and the lack of interest of [Western] students and/or professors toward Chinese knowledge were commonly reported by [Chinese] students.' This unresponsiveness extends to Chinese students' names. Edwards (2006, p. 94) contends that Western teachers are 'instrumental in bringing about name changes,' by telling students that they need an English name because Chinese names are difficult to remember. Edwards (2006, p. 95) reports that a:

student was coerced into choosing an English name by her American teacher in China. She initially decided on Helen. When she informed the teacher of her choice, he explained that Helen was the name of Helen of Troy who was very beautiful, and since she was not beautiful, it would be inappropriate for her to have the name Helen. He suggested Ellen instead and so she adopted Ellen as her name.

Edwards (2006, p. 95) argues that the 'particularly disturbing . . . message that these teachers are giving students in insisting that they adopt English names is that who they are and their [intellectual] culture is not important.' This one-way transfer of Western theoretical knowledge to China, or 'teleological Westernisation' (Bilgin, 2008) positions Western nations as:

the ultimate measure of progress below which other nations are placed . . . developing nations are expected to 'catch-up' with western nations by generally replicating western political, economic and social models. (Naidoo, 2007, p. 250)

This provocative research suggests that there are several limitations to internationalising Australian research education via 'Eurocentric diffusionism' (Blaut, 1993) or 'teleological Westernisation' (Bilgin, 2008).

First, in contrast to Connell's (2007) limited timeframe, there is a need to take a long-term, global historical perspective on transnational knowledge exchange and accumulation. Hobson (2004) contends that Western capitalist modernity and its globalisation cannot be explained in terms of an intellectually independent, self-generative West. On the contrary, knowledge flows from Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and East Asia into Western Europe provided at least some intellectual resources for its development. Advanced ideas, institutions and technologies were diffused throughout the West via economic and communications networks stretching

across Eurasia. The rise of the West as a global intellectual power benefited from its assimilation and elaboration of knowledge from the East.

Second, the assumption that the West is the permanent centre from which innovative ideas originate is questionable. There has been no one fixed source of knowledge exchange, but rather alternating sources (Goody, 2010). The view that the differential advantage the West currently holds in global multilingual knowledge economies is going to be sustained in a process of evolutionary, linear development is mistaken. Goody's (2010) history of transnational knowledge exchange holds that no one place has been a fixed, ever-lasting source of the world's knowledge. The West occupies this position – for the moment. Goody (2010) argues that the interactions between Eurasian civilisations have been such that first one, and then another, secures the advantages of sophisticated knowledge-producing, accumulation and exchange systems. There is no permanent supremacy, but alternation of intellectual advantage as cultures communicate, exchange knowledge through products and services, and engage intellectually with each other.

Third, China is not passively accepting the one-way transfer of Western theoretical knowledge. Chinese intellectuals, ambivalent about importing foreign knowledge, debate its acceptability (Davies, 2007; Keith, 2009). They criticise the global dominance of Western knowledge and the marginalisation of Chinese theories (Chu, 2008; Welch & Zhang, 2007). They resist the perceived inferiority of 'Chinese theories' within a Western-dominated world, and promote epistemological parity between China and the West (Currie, Vidovich, & Yang, 2007). As China re-integrates itself into a world from which it felt unjustly marginalised by the West's Cold War policy of 'containment,' it is moving to elevate Chinese theories to a force of global relevance (Lo Bianco, 2007; Tsung & Cruickshank, 2011). Chinese research students increasingly expect intellectual reciprocity due to the increasing global significance of China's revival (Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005; Yao, 2002). The next section analyses 'pedagogies of intellectual equality', that is pedagogies whereby Chinese theoretical tools are used to address challenges China's intellectual renaissance poses for internationalising Australian research education.

### **Pedagogies of intellectual equality**

Doctoral education is daunting. It stretches the intellectual resources of research educators and supervisors, creates anxieties about ever-changing interpretations of what counts as an original contribution to knowledge, and reveals one's lack of capability to deal with emerging areas of study. Research educators need knowledge of their discipline and research processes, the life-cycle of a doctoral project, university research management procedures and ever-changing policies governing research productivity and commodification so as to best educate and position their research students. In Australia, these challenges have been compounded by the internationalisation of research education and the many students who come from Asian countries (Australian Government, 2011). Paradoxically, despite this, Asian language studies are markedly underfunded as they are 'regarded as an expensive and somewhat superfluous distraction from the core [Australian university] curricula' (Keith, 2009, p. xi). A major difficulty confronting the research education of students from China is that many Anglo-Australian supervisors know little Chinese language or theory (Clyne, 2007; Currie, Vidovich, & Yang, 2007). Zhou, Knoke and Sakamoto (2005, p. 301) explain the problem thus:

The unfamiliarity of peer students and/or professors with Chinese society, knowledge and culture also limited their ability to respond to and engage in discussion and thus discouraged Chinese students' attempt to exchange cross-context/cultural information/knowledge in class.

The Research-Oriented School-Engaged Teacher Education (ROSETE) Program (University of Western Sydney) has been developed to stimulate the teaching and learning of Chinese language in Western Sydney Region schools, albeit with negligible government funding (Tsung & Cruickshank, 2011). The Anglophone research educators in the team know little about the Chinese theoretical tools that research students from China might employ in researching Australian schools' engagement with this global language. However, the ROSETE Program has been constructed on the basis of Rancière's (1991) concept of the *ignorance of inequality*. Rancière (1991) recounts the experiments of a nineteenth-century teacher, Joseph Jacotot, who supposedly taught French to Flemish students in the Netherlands when neither party knew the other's language. Pedagogically, Jacotot claimed to have developed his students' bilingual capabilities through creating opportunities for them to learn what he did not know. For the ROSETE Program, this means not accepting inequalities inherent in 'Eurocentric diffusionism' (Blaut, 1993) or 'teleological Westernisation' (Bilgin, 2008) as an explanation for differences in the performance of Chinese research students.

The purpose of the ROSETE Program is to see what these research students can achieve based on the presupposition of *intellectual equality*. The Program does not seek to prove that any or all of these are students equally intelligent as any other, or that China has equally powerful theoretical resources. The Program presupposes that Chinese research students are equally capable of using Chinese theoretical tools for scholarly argumentation (Singh & Han, 2009, 2010). It is presumed that they 'bring with them ideas and knowledge that have the potential to make inroads into the hegemony of "Western" knowledges at their host institution' (Epstein, 2007, p. 2). In 2010–2011, 17 Master of Education (Honours) and five Doctoral students from China successfully graduated from the Program within the minimum time.

These research students drew on Chinese intellectual resources to produce novel theoretical tools. For instance, Chinese concepts provided Huang (2011) with useful theoretical tools for making sense of the Australian schools in which she worked as a volunteer teacher-researcher. She provided a literal translation and explicit definition of the *chengyu* 因材施教 (*yīn cái shī jiào*), that is *teaching that accords with students' characteristics and capabilities*. She established this *chengyu* as a conceptual tool for interpreting her own teaching. She was able to employ this concept to challenge theories of language education used in Australia. Huang explained the relatedness of this analytical tool to China's socio-historical and literary-philosophical contexts and reflected on the transformative learning she experienced through this Australia/China dialogical connection.

Chinese students' uses of Chinese theoretical tools serve as a reminder that 'English is not a universal tertiary educational language that subsumes all national languages' (Marginson, 2004, p. 106). The ROSETE Program points to possibilities for Australian research education to engage with theoretical tools in students' various languages, and the potential for verifying bilingual research students' capabilities for making original contributions to knowledge.

Given the limitations of Australia's languages policy (Lo Bianco, 2007; Orton, 2008), however, it is doubtful whether its universities are ready for such challenges. There are difficulties to be confronted in implementing pedagogies of intellectual equality in academia. Some academics, faced with the discomfort of being positioned as 'international learners', may dismiss as non-scholarly, if not disrespectful, Rancière's (1991) concept of 'ignorance of inequality'. Little support can be expected from those universities that Kincheloe (2008, p. 149) claims are 'working to reclaim the inherent [intellectual] superiority of the West, its imperialist aspirations, and Eurocentric ways of producing knowledge.' Yet, there are academics pursuing pedagogies of intellectual equality. For example, Fayard (2003) uses the Japanese concept of *ba* to theorise knowledge creation, and Haigh (2009) uses Indian concepts of *gunas* and *dharma* to design an internationalised curriculum. Likewise, Pavlenko's (2003) pedagogies challenge English-only ideology and its monolingual bias, and Grant (2010) provides an approach to doctoral education which engages *mātauranga Māori*, that is Māori knowledge.

Another obstacle is that international students from China themselves may lack the self-confidence for using Chinese theoretical tools in their research for fear of causing offence and potential punitive consequences. However, some international students from China *are* arguing for intellectual engagement with Chinese theoretical resources. For instance, Zhou, Knoke and Sakamoto (2005, p. 303) 'question the unequal relationship between different knowledge in the Canadian/Western educational context' and Yao (2002) argues for sharing Chinese theoretical knowledge, including the theories of Deweyan scholar, Tao Xingzhi. The ROSETE Program recognises that research education is a key source of the original knowledge produced in universities. Pedagogical support for students to publish their research involves, as Kamler (2008) argues, co-authorship with their supervisors who scaffold the know-how required to enhance students' publication output.

The ROSETE students have not only analysed Australia's language policy (Clyne, 2007; Currie, Vidovich, & Yang, 2007; Lo Bianco, 2007; Orton, 2008) but also the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) policy for ranking scholarly journals to re-shape the distribution of public resources across and within universities (Haslam & Koval, 2010). The ERA is a mechanism for pushing the research productivity of Australia's research students and their supervisors through managing, measuring, monitoring and evaluating their contributions to knowledge. The following section indicates that the ROSETE students' analysis of the ERA focused on what policy-makers need to know, or *not* to know, in order to enact it.

### The ERA as an instance of 'optimal ignorance'

The ERA journal ranking proposed to use publications to increase researchers' productivity, including the output of research students, and to increase the commodification of research. To appreciate the complexities of the policy process, the ROSETE students used the concept of 'optimal ignorance' (Ilchman & Dhar, 1971) to analyse the *Ministerial statement to the Senate Economics Legislation Committee Improvements to Excellence in Research for Australia* (Carr, 2011) to determine what policy-makers need *not* know in order to enact the ERA journal ranking.

The students gained a sense of policy complexity from examining the apparatus charged with producing the ERA journal rankings. This included the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research; the Australian Research Council; the

Research Evaluation Committee of the government's *ERA for Australia* initiative; the previous government through its discontinued Research Quality Framework; expert bibliometric advisors; and institutional research managers (Carr, 2011). There were, however, other significant contributors in the policy-making process who were not acknowledged in Minister Carr's (2011) media statement: these included the Scholarly and Journals Committee of the Australian Publishers Association; individual publishers who sponsored meetings between government and academic lobby groups; journal editors; and learned societies (Blatchford, 2011).

From the self-declared perspective of evidence-based policy making (Carr, 2011), the students assumed that the Minister would know that the best policy decisions are those informed by the largest amount of evidence. Every increase in evidence would be valuable for making policy decisions about whether to implement the ERA journal rankings. Historical evidence shows that such performance indicators have been deployed 'inappropriately' and produced 'harmful outcomes' (Singh, 1989; 1990). However, the Minister could argue that the ERA journal ranking was necessarily produced on limited evidence due to financial stringencies and an unavoidably limited timeframe. Such a claim is reasonable because:

diminishing returns begin to set in to further increments of information and the most exhaustive explanation probably costs more resources, if acted upon, than a regime might have, take longer than the longest time horizon a statesman or civil servant might possess, involve a larger constituency than the policy can afford, and, in the process, require the forgoing of the multitude of alternative purposes regimes pursue. (Ilchman & Dhar, 1971, p. 524)

Therefore, policy-makers could reasonably determine that, in order to enact the ERA journal rankings, certain knowledge or evidence was not needed.

The ROSETE students saw these policy-makers confronting the problem of deciding what level of not knowing was acceptable in this situation.

A second problem is the language used to explain the evidence and justify the ERA journal ranking. For instance, it could, as Haslam and Koval (2010) suggest, be publicly defended in terms of increasing researcher productivity, commodifying research and redistributing public resources for the benefit of elites. The problem here concerns 'the kind of metaphor one employs to capture the major characteristics of the phenomena in question. [The issue being] whether they obscure or illuminate important relations and connections' (Ilchman & Dhar, 1971, p. 532).

Further, policy-makers had to cope with unexpected and unanticipated problems about the ERA journal ranking that had not been previously considered but had caused sufficient concern to warrant policy change. For instance, Hardy, Heimans and Lingard (2011) demonstrate that the ERA sanctified the world's privileged Anglophone research producers and distributors at the expense of alternative research programs and dissemination channels, including those in global languages such as Chinese, Spanish and Arabic. In deciding to abolish the ERA journal ranking, as the Minister did in mid-2011, he explained this policy decision was based on the following factors:

I have been aware for some time of concerns within the sector about certain aspects of the exercise, particularly the ranked journal lists. These concerns have been communicated to me directly, reported in the sector media, and voiced in the

Excellence in Research for Australia (ARC)'s extensive sector consultations ahead of preparations for the second iteration of ERA in 2012. (Carr, 2011, p. 1)

Here the ROSETE students could see the type of 'evidence' used in 'evidence-based' policy making. The Minister made it clear that policy decisions are made on the basis of personal communications with him, media reports and consultations. However, the students also noted that the Minister did not mention that the ERA journal rankings had artificially stymied the international market for the 80% of journals not ranked A or A\* (Blatchford, 2011), and that this hindered the Government's agenda for the commodification of research. As research students, they understood themselves to be confronted with a policy that was to use publications to increase their productivity as researchers as well as to underwrite the commodification of their intellectual products in journals published largely by multinational companies. However, the students could also see how this policy thwarted the commodification of Australia's research outputs by reducing the potential publication outlets because it obstructed the international market for 80 per cent of the largely English language journals listed in the ERA ranking. They were not overly surprised that use of published journal rankings to drive Australian researchers' productivity has seemingly been abandoned.

Using this 'case', the ROSETE students concluded that the Minister had opted for 因噎废食 (*yīnyēfèishí*), that is, not 'giving up eating for fear of choking'. They argued that the Minister decided to abolish the journal ranking system for driving research productivity and the commodification of knowledge but has not terminated the larger ERA agenda. In this view, an evidence-driven policy is questionable because it confronts substantial uncertainties about the relationship between policy goals (ends) and policy implementation (means). Moreover, it requires evidence of (a) multiple values for the (b) multiple ways problems may be framed given the (c) multiple causes and the (d) multiple possible solutions. Further, the students advanced the proposition that policy-making is a matter of ascertaining: (a) the costs of knowing and not knowing; (b) what does not need to be known within a given time-frame; and (c) the grounds for the assumptions needed to enact a policy. Overall, the students offer the following critique: 朝令夕改 – *zhao ling xi gai*, – where 朝 means 'morning,' 令 'order,' 夕 'evening' and 改 'change'. Literally, this concept means that the government issues a policy in the morning and changes it in the evening. They used this concept, which originates from an ancient Chinese classic ('*hanshu*'), to criticise frequent policy changes for purposively confusing research students about what to do. Such a critique demonstrates the presumption that Chinese research students are capable of scholarly argumentation using Chinese theoretical tools.

## Conclusion

This article has added to the complexity of internationalising Australian research education by defining it as learning from China. The global flow of Chinese people throughout the world provides an intellectual reason for engaging in the transnational exchange of Chinese theoretical knowledge. This has implications for all those international and migrant students that Australia recruits from non-Western countries, suggesting that their theoretical knowledge should be seen as a normal source for Australia's intellectual engagement. Further research is needed into the

credibility and value of non-Western theoretical tools for internationalising Australian research education.

The ROSETE Program's pedagogies of intellectual equality contribute to internationalising Australian research education through intellectual engagement with Chinese theoretical knowledge. Potentially, it is a transformative research education program whereby Anglophone research educators and supervisors engage Chinese students in developing scholarly arguments informed by metaphors, concepts and images from their homeland. As I have shown here, the students can turn these tools to topics as diverse as an analysis of Australian policies framing researchers' productivity and the commodification of the knowledge they produce or those related to language education. The rationale for undertaking these enquiries is to develop intellectual relations with the non-Western homelands from which most of Australia's international and immigrant students are recruited. The concept of pedagogies of intellectual equality extends the debate over developing students' bilingual research capabilities as a defining feature of internationalising Australian research education.

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### Notes on contributor

Professor Michael Singh leads a team of researchers studying the internationalisation of Australian research education by investigating what can be learnt through using Chinese language and theoretical knowledge.

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