

# **Chapter 13: Expatriation and incapacity created by a multitude of hidden equalities**

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## **13.1 Abstract**

The ability of UK based Academics to function within collaborative partnerships is becoming an important part of the UK Universities internationalisation agenda. This chapter offers an auto-ethnographical academic expatriate experience detailing some of the challenges faced when moving to work in a 'UK environment positioned abroad', specifically in China. It will provide HR personnel with alternative understandings of possible support strategies that could assist individuals in dealing with a variety of hidden inequalities that surface. These hidden inequalities can contribute to a possible shortening of the assignment due to cultural contexts in which they are operating (Foster 1997; Wang and Varma 2017).

## **13.2 Introduction**

Whilst preparing for my own expatriate adventure, I researched journal articles concerning the experiences of expatriates. The research primarily focused on why these experiences are not always as positive as hoped, often leading to shortened assignments (Foster 1997; Tharenou and Caulfield 2010; Wang and Varma 2017). What is often missing from these articles is the lived experiences of those for whom the assignment finished before expected. Caligiuri and Bonache (2016) have identified a lack of research into the individual level issues of working abroad and Ng and Earley (2006) suggest that the failed experiences offer an opportunity to reflect and learn increasing self-efficacy and cultural intelligence (Ramalu et al. 2012). This chapter begins the process of addressing this gap by offering a personal narrative (Denzin 2000) of life as an academic expatriate working in China through a period of intense change.

In order to address research at the individual level, the chosen methodology is reflexive auto-ethnography. The narrative style of auto-ethnography forms and reforms as it progresses into socially mediated discourse (Gergen 1985; Schembri and Boyle 2013), and has two objectives. The first is to address and mediate between various constructed realities, including the researcher's own constructs (Wolcott 2009). The second is to enable the

researcher/practitioner to consciously embed personal experiences within theory and practice surrounding the study (McIlveen 2008).

When developing qualitative and personal research, there is an issue of how to write the study, so that it may develop constructive conclusions (Southgate 2003; Tosh 2013). Within business management research, Humphreys and Watson (2000) makes a case for a more creative writing style to develop authenticity and reader engagement. The use of ethnographic and auto-ethnographic research can bridge the gap between the assumed and demanded readerly style of text within social sciences, as opposed to the writerly text more often found in humanities. The distinction between these two writing styles is important in the writing of this auto-ethnographic study. Barthes (1983) initially identified the distinction. Within a readerly text the author 'authorises' the experiences of the reader. The reader's experience pre-determined by the author within a text that is usually linear with clear explanations of events and subjects. There are clear signposts and the reader does not have to include or consider their own thoughts when reading the text in order to make sense. The writerly text, on the other hand, requires the reader to make connections between images and events within the text and their own experiences. It requires a reflexive style of writing and reading. In many ways, it represents the real world more accurately in terms of the open, ambiguous and unpredictable nature of life, allowing the wisdom of the reader to add depth of understanding or action to the text (Sumara and Luce-Kapler 1993).

Auto-ethnographic writing is therefore a writerly text, leaving the reader to empathise with the researcher/practitioner in order to understand the more subjective areas of human life coming from a first-person voice. There are various formats used for writerly texts, Humphreys (2005) uses Vignettes to illustrate certain experiences in his academic life. Misiaszek (2018) uses a series of mediations including poetry to develop a view of her experiences in Chinese higher education. The auto-ethnographic study of Gant (2017) takes direct diary quotations to explore the challenges of bringing up a disabled child. From a business perspective, Vickers (2008) tells a story from a personal perspective of changes happening within his company during a takeover by an American firm. All of these texts offer a subjective insight into the challenges and reactions of the practitioner/researcher. However, these texts also articulate and anticipate the author's vulnerability in writing this type of text.

Buzard (2003, p.1608) suggests that the researcher should ‘Treat any auto-ethnographic text as an inked tattoo’, something that will be permanently there. The idea of vulnerability and how others might interpret the text is a concern (Humphreys 2005; Misiaszek 2018), and I particularly identify with the notion of ‘not commodifying out China experience’ (2018, p.90). Although I will also admit that part of this exercise is to enable a development of my own multi-cultural identity (Mao and Shen 2015). There is also truth in the fact that this type of writing is an ‘uncomfortable experience’ one that is fraught with protecting others and oneself, whilst attempting to articulate the experience in a meaningful way. The issue of protecting others becomes more problematic in a small institution. The institution concerned in this auto-ethnographic account is a small, hierarchical Sino-foreign College part of a larger Chinese University. This makes anonymising other actors, whilst enabling a fair representation of the interactions, problematic. It is a small international academic culture within the larger cultures of a big University, large city and China more generally (Moosa 2013). On the other hand, auto-ethnographic writing should not be tamed (Ellis and Bochner 2006, p.433) because of these considerations. If it is not a truthful reflexive piece, there is little value and it has little purpose. Therefore, the decision centres on what experiences to write, and how to safeguard other actors and myself, whilst keeping faith with the stories chosen.

The data comes from an extensive diary kept over the year. It includes impressions and reflections of meetings, notes taken at meetings, engagement with various academic report writing and new curriculum developments. My reflective writings at the time where an attempt to take the opportunity to learn from tensions between differences and diversity that I knew and expected would exist (Suransky and Alma 2016). This was one of the reasons I accepted the role, I wanted to learn and I was in China to learn. The reflexive practice that I am now engaging in (Johnson and Duberly 2003; Alvesson and Wilmott 2003), is an attempt to surface the hidden inequalities that contributed to the experiences I had and to enable some sort of sense-making (Weick 1995). In light of the above discussion, I have chosen to explore my interaction with specific Chinese policies, the practices created and the resultant hidden inequalities engendered. The choice of something inanimate links to Non-Representational Theory (Thrift 2008) where there is a focus on the material dimensions of life and how practices inform the enactment and performance of human life, so seems an ethical way to proceed.

### **13.3 From Small Beginnings**

Reading my materials, there are five events that I would like to share, linking policies with subsequent performance, practice, action and reaction. Entry 1 reflects on my arrival and first few weeks in China. The second Entry considers my first annual Learning and Teaching meeting with Chinese and International academic staff. The third Entry details a formal meeting with the Ministry of Education and the Department of International Cooperation and Partnerships. Entry 4 relates an initial preparation meeting for a quality audit from the local municipal education department, which started in April 2017. The thread through these events was the government policy of ‘Cultivation of Talent and the underlying Internationalisation agenda. These policies created a series of actions and reactions within the College academic group highlighting a range of hidden inequalities embedded within the College’s small academic culture. The concluding Entry focuses on preparations to leave China and contains the conclusion, summary and recommendations.

### *13.3.1 Entry 1: Arrival in China*

Arriving in China was a mind-blowing experience, the noise, the smells, the people all of it was deafening to all senses. Along the way, I had also accrued two new descriptions of myself. The first was a self-initiated expatriate (McNulty and Brewster 2017), defined as

‘Legally working individuals who reside temporarily in a country of which they are not a citizen in order to accomplish a career-related goal, being relocated aboard either by an organisation, by self-initiation or directly employed within the host country’ (McNulty and Brewster 2017: 21).

The second was that of Foreign Expert/Foreign Talent, these two phrases are interchangeable depending on which Ministerial Office is being dealt with. These terms did cause me difficulty, as I was neither an expert nor a talent according to the Oxford Dictionary definitions:

Expert: Noun – A person who is very knowledgeable about or skilful in a particular area (oxforddictionaries.com)

Talent: Noun – Natural aptitude or skill (oxforddictionaries.com)

I am a ‘non-standard academic’ (Humphreys 2005), having spent 12 years in manufacturing and a similar number of years as a mother and part-time worker. As a late academic, I felt that I had to some extent developed my own academic identity, understood what I felt was important and had managed to overcome the ‘imposter’ syndrome that I experienced following the award of my PhD (Knights and Clarke 2014; Hutchins and Rainbolt 2017; Breeze 2018). However, I had never viewed myself as a ‘Talent’ or ‘Expert’. In my diary, I noted ‘So, not only am I a member of the College Senior Management Team, I am also an expert and a foreigner! Amazing what a trip across the world can do!’ I just considered these bureaucratic terms as part of the immigration policy in China.

Within three weeks, I had an apartment, registered at the local police station, undergone my medical examination, acquired my ‘Foreign Expert Certification’ transferred my Z visa to a visa of residency. I had acquired a Chinese mobile phone, two Chinese bank accounts and managed to furnish my apartment, including the acquisition of a European mattress from Ikea. I enjoyed the daily life in China, sorted out Chinese lessons and looked forward to my new job.

My role had College wide responsibility for academic quality of the UK degree courses and was threefold. The first was to embed a re-structure that occurred prior to my arrival. Second, to start of the process of developing a Higher Education culture of scholarship and research into an institution that ran a UK foundation degree and four separate undergraduate programmes from UK Universities. The third was to develop a coherent quality structure that fulfilled the requirements of all four Universities but gave the College its own Quality Assurance identity. I was very comfortable with these objectives. I had spent 12 years in manufacturing introducing cultural change and felt that my knowledge of UK Higher Education quality assurance systems was up to date following the writing and validation of several programmes, together with ensuring the quality of a range of international partnerships within Asia. The role and the challenges were exciting and I could not wait to start, and was excited by the task.

At the time, I had not reflected fully on the effect of the titles, labels and names that I had acquired during my six-thousand-mile flight. Language is never neutral and there is always a surface and a socially embedded meaning to any word (Derrida 1976). Foucault (1979) defines statements such as ‘Foreign Talent or Foreign Expert’ as a discursive formation, embedded within the culture. They are statements that generate and to some extent demand particular actions from individuals in order for the individual to ‘own’ that statement. It also demands actions from others in terms of the cultural significance of the statement. From a reflexive position, I cannot help but wonder whether these labels not only affected me, but also affected the actions and reactions of those around me. In China, titles and names are very important in the social hierarchical structure of the society at all levels. Names and titles provide the information required for social engagement and etiquette. Looking

back, I should have recognised that the term was more than a bureaucratic convenience, that it did also have social meaning (Blum 1997; Edwards 2008; Scollon, Scollon and Jones 2011).

Recalling my frame of mind subsequent to receiving the title of Doctor, I felt a return of the ‘imposter syndrome’ (Knights and Clarke 2014; Hutchins and Rainbolt 2017; Breeze 2018), creating a feeling of low-level anxiety and uncertainty. This is one key area that can affect expatriate performance (Shaffer et al. 2006) and have a damaging effect on the ability to engage with cross cultural adjustment and access cultural intelligence (Ramalu et al. 2012; Ang et al. 2006, 2007). There is a link between Foreign Experts and the government policy ‘Cultivation of talent’ together with the underlying Internationalisation policy. This is particularly relevant to the aspirations of achieving globally ranked universities (Deem, Mok and Lucas 2008). This policy also has a negative aspect, with Chinese academics concerned that the foreign interventions would result in the loss of academic and educational sovereignty (Qin 2014). This is an aspect I have only considered having returned to the UK and perhaps justified my feelings of anxiety at the time. It is not a cultural issue, as such, it is more of a ‘small culture issue’ (Moosa 2013) that of academia and in particular the ‘small culture’ within the Sino-Foreign College.

The second point of consideration in relation to the title Foreign Expert was the fact that I had the money to acquire a two-bedroom apartment in a downtown area of a Tier 1 city. I had the money to purchase a mobile phone, a European mattress and all the other items that I needed to feel comfortable. In other words, I had everything I needed from international health care to a lovely apartment enabling a rapid psychological adjustment to the new culture (Ramalu et al. 2012). This is one of the advantages of being a Foreign Expert; the pay was substantially more than a Chinese National (Caligiuri and Bonache 2016; Wang and Varma 2017), together with a range of additional tax benefits. I also remember talking to a Chinese Colleague about it and feeling the need to justifying it.

It was easy to justify, back in the UK there are things like mortgages to repay, pension funds to pay into, and the salary to some extent compensates for lost academic opportunities. For example, access to all the high quality resources we have in a UK institution, the opportunities to apply for and receive grants, the time to write papers for publishing. However, Koh (2003) does offer an alternative idea, suggesting it comes down to who is grateful to whom. I suppose it is a mutual gratitude. I was very pleased and grateful for having the opportunity to go and

work in this particular institution. The more problematic question was ‘were they grateful to have me, or did my Chinese colleagues perceive me as a threat to their academic sovereignty due to my role and brief? My second reflexive question concerns gratitude to the government and the Ministry of Education. Should I have in some way demonstrated gratitude to the government for the privileged position I held? I will return to these two initial questions as the answers become clearer.

### 13.3.2 Entry 2: *The first Learning and Teaching meeting January*

My Chinese counterpart, who had overview of the Chinese arrangements at the College, arranged a meeting with one day’s notice. My initial reaction was annoyance. I had planned meetings with some of the academic staff for that day, duly logged in my outlook calendar together with meeting requests and an agenda. That evening I wrote in my diary, ‘Really...no notice, no agenda, and no papers for discussion...how do I prepare...why only 1 days’ notice???’ I later found out it was a regular annual meeting with Chinese Colleagues to discuss the forthcoming year. The meeting was about four hours and the agenda and any papers made available at the meeting. If anything, I was more annoyed as it was my first major meeting with Chinese colleagues and I could not prepare. However, I also thought it would give me the opportunity to start networks with our Chinese counterparts and to find out a bit more about the quality assurance processes at the College and within the Chinese University. At this meeting the College team was informed of the introduction of a new module to demonstrate entrepreneurial and innovative activities.

The one thing I had so far identified within the College was the large workload that students had. Although students completed a foundation course which included English Language courses. These courses were designed for students moving to an English-speaking environment for the second and subsequent years. Our students, however, continued their studies in English within China, so did not have the benefit of an immersive language experience. They also had to complete a series of Chinese modules in order to graduate. I voiced my concerns about workload and the possibility that this could be detrimental to the grades reached by students in their UK degrees. A colleague pointed out that across all the courses we ran, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship was embedded within key modules. After discussion, it was agreed that we would develop a table demonstrating the embedded nature of these activities and that the Chinese QA would check that was fulfilling their module requirements. In a discussion, it was also mentioned that it might be productive to introduce a student portfolio of their educational journey that could also include engagement with the activities mentioned. There the conversation was left. I felt that I was in control of the situation, gained confidence from the support from the UK staff and the acknowledgment from Chinese colleagues and a way forward to mitigate the additional module. In my diary, I wrote ‘All good, the end of a long but productive meeting’.

I also put a note into my outlook calendar for December 2017 to check out when the annual meeting was going to be and to ensure the UK voice within the meeting. The Heads of School duly completed the mapping exercise and it was submitted to the University. Job Done! I decided that over the course of my duties I would gradually introduce a system of using outlook-meeting invitations and start to create an academic meetings calendar where meetings of a reoccurring nature could be set in advance and logged into diaries as would happen in a UK institution. Lead by example! Bachelor

From a reflexive perspective, I realise there were several opportunities here for me to engage with difference and diversity and engage with learning (Suransky and Alma 2018). The first was around the setting of meetings. It did not occur to me that there might be cultural significance in the way meetings were organised, and I should

have taken the time out to understand from a cultural perspective what was happening and why. Instead, I considered that there is only one acceptable set of academic and ethical values attached to this situation (Said 1978; Qin 2014; Wilkins, 2017). I was viewing the setting of meetings from an individualistic perspective, everyone's time is important and therefore planning for regular meetings should take place out of respect. What I did not appreciate was that within that University there was a meeting each week with the Chinese management team to set meetings for the following week. However, the discovery of this knowledge creates further reflexivity. Why were my colleagues and myself excluded from this planning meeting?

I felt at the time it was about power and I felt that I was losing a power struggle. It felt as if my time and therefore I was not important. However, if I focus on policies rather than feelings, a different view comes into focus, one that is more in line with Suransky and Alma (2018) suggestion that learning is only possible in tension. The aim is not to fully integrate or assimilate differences but to engage in dialogue. This is because actions and motives require, but do not always receive, 'a patient effort of interpretation' (Nussbaum 1997, p.63). The development of networks both socially and in the work place is important in helping with cultural adjustment and developing trust (Wang and Varma 2017). The weekly planning meeting in the main University campus would have been an ideal opportunity to start this process. However, this never transpired. My main question is why? There seemed to be a roadblock between myself and my Chinese counterpart and I was increasingly uncertain as to how this dynamic could be changed. As each week went by, the opportunities to build trust and develop reciprocity between us, an important part of cultural integration (Lazarova et al. 2010), moved further out of reach. Unfortunately, it was going to be several months before the reason behind this inability to build a relationship became clearer.



### 13.3.3 Entry 3: *The Meeting – March*

The inability to understand the exclusion I felt left me feeling at odds with the academic world I found myself in. This feeling continued into a meeting that was held with the local municipal Department of Education, the Ministry of Education and the Department of International Cooperation and Exchanges. It was a very formal meeting; participants were sat in a very specific order, according to ranking (or perhaps perceived ranking). Prior to the meeting, however, some really engaging informal conversations took place in English, giving an insight into the political world of academia, not much different to the UK, except I probably will never get the opportunity of having an informal conversation with the Minister for Education! What surprised me was that the formal event took place in Chinese. This meant that all the English-speaking participants had to have an interpreter whispering the translation.

However, the most important message of the meeting was delivered in English. We were told in no uncertain terms that the internationalisation agenda was a top priority for all Higher Education institutions. Bringing international students into the classroom and developing academic relationships and programme provision with the top-ranking Universities in the UK was our main purpose. In my journal I noted that this was not something we had succeeded in. It was a difficult situation. Until we gained the trust of the UK Universities in terms of quality assurance and delivered top performances from students, it would be difficult to engage with the top universities in the UK. In my diary, I noted that the term 'Foreign Expert' could be viewed as a Utility term, one which could provide a distinct service and then disposed of, either after delivering the service or not being able to deliver that service.

Looking back on this meeting, from a safe distance of several thousand miles, I can identify a range of hidden inequalities beginning to materialise. There seemed to be a connection between names and titles, the notion of Face, Guanxi and the use of language. The first comes down to the importance of names and titles in China and a connection with the notion of Face and Guanxi (Blum 1997; Richards 2008; Fang and Faure 2011; Li et al 2016). Face concerns the desire to present a positive image of one's self or to confirm a positive image of another in a social interaction. Guanxi refers to the use of networks and connections to secure favours and to gain competitive advantage (Li et al 2016).

I can understand the pragmatic logic at work. My colleagues and I on the UK management team were employed as foreign academic experts. From the University perspective, the Sino-Foreign College was a perfect vehicle for bringing in International students and providing programmes from top UK Institutions. Logically, through Guanxi, we were in a perfect position to leverage contacts in the UK and enable the Chinese University to fulfil its obligations within the Internationalisation agenda. Having not delivered that requirement, irrespective of the time frame, did we deserve the title of 'Foreign Expert'? Secondly, could it possibly be that my Chinese colleague felt that I was being ungrateful for not employing my Guanxi in order to help the University in their obligations. Or worse, was I deliberately engineering a position where 'Face' was being lost by my colleague because I had made no commitment to deliver 'top UK University programmes or international students' to the

University. Was the use of Chinese in the meeting, rather than a mixture of Chinese and English which was normally the case, a particular point being made?

Within this Higher Education context, a tension develops between internationalisation, world class University status and the concern of losing academic sovereignty (Qin 2014). There is a complex interaction here between policy, that of internationalisation and the tensions inherent in China's wish to stand independently in the global academic world and us as the 'Experts' of internationalisation. This idea of the importance of academic sovereignty is recognisable in the structural charts of Sino-foreign collaborations. Although on the structural chart there was an equivalency between the UK senior management team members and the corresponding Chinese colleagues, this was not necessarily out of an understanding of mutual respect or true partnership. It was part of the Chinese legislation governing Sino-foreign collaborations. The Principal position must also be a Chinese national (Qin 2014). So in effect, the Chinese Colleagues were more senior. Over the last few years, this oversight has been intensified. Universities have set up Communist Party departments to oversee political teaching and thinking at University level (Times Higher Education 2017/8/30).

This emphasises the academic seniority of the Chinese Colleagues with the Sino-foreign partnerships. Was the use of language in the high level meeting an attempt to clarify that boundary? Even through this reflexive piece of work, I have not found an answer to this question; however, it brings into perspective the idea of Cultural Intelligence and Cultural knowledge (Ang et al 2006; 2007). From an academic perspective, I am a reasonably culturally aware person. I teach diversity and have always felt that I embrace diversity. One of the reasons I chose to work abroad was to learn more about living in a culturally different society. What happens though, when you are comfortable with the external realities, the day to day living in a different culture, but the 'small culture' of your work place is suddenly going through a political change of emphasis? How do you catch up and understand the intricate details of what is changing when your language ability is limited.

#### 13.3.4 Entry 4: Audit Preparation Meeting– April/May 2017

Following the visit, strange things started to happen in the College, which were not reported in the Management meetings. The first was signage, all the signage in the campus was being changed from just English into Chinese Characters and English underneath. A whole floor was taken out of use and was ‘refurbished’ to create an Entrepreneurial, Innovation and Creative space. Teaching space had to be reallocated at short notice, it was hard to find out what was going on, Staff were confused and the UK management team were in the dark with no answers.

One morning, in amongst the chaos and confusion, a message came through that an important preliminary audit meeting was being held that afternoon. It was this first meeting and the subsequent workload that led me to understand more about the context in which I had been working. The meeting did bring lightness to the dark! The meeting was once again called at very short notice, being informed in the morning that the meeting was to take place in the afternoon. In my diary I had made no note of being annoyed, either there was too much else happening for me to find time to be annoyed, or I have acclimatised to the issue.

At the meeting, I learned that I had responsibility for six sections of the audit document. I was given a piece of paper written in Chinese with some handwritten annotations in English, giving titles of the various sections. The meeting was conducted in Chinese with only the sections relevant to me being translated. I could feel my anxiety rising as I did not understand the context of the audit or what the perimeters were. I was even confused about what I was supposed to write. When asking for a translation I was told there was no time in the group to translate the document and I would have to find a secretary to do it for me. This meant asking someone who could speak English well and was already overworked. I was also aware by this point at the very small salary that the administrative staff received.

In my reflections of this meeting I noted that I felt very uneasy about asking the academic administrators to translate the document at a time when the academic side was preparing for examination boards, but I needed to get the document translated. My ‘Foreign Expert’ title was in perspective; I certainly was no expert in Chinese. I was also informed that my writing had to be translated into Chinese before being submitted. The document was in total 10 chapters and I asked about word count and was told the document in total should be over 500 pages. Once the audit requirements document had been translated, I was actually more confused, probably because I did not understand the context. The first heading was ‘The Cultivation of Talent’. I asked my international colleagues if they knew what this meant, and how to write about it within what was happening in the College. There was no answer, the Chinese academic staff were also unsure. Therefore, I started to research.

My Chinese counterpart had responsibility for the audit. I thought this might be an opportunity shift the dynamics between us. It was also an area that I had experience of in the UK. I completed the document ahead of schedule, in spite of the problems with translation. I had added photographs, which my Chinese counterpart loved. It was not long before other colleagues were taking photographs to add to their sections of the report. However, to this day I have no idea what the final version of the report said. I requested a copy, now in Chinese with no English translation. I could not guarantee that what I had written was in the report following the review process. I asked for a track changed Chinese version, but that was unavailable. It was a difficult position and quite worrying. If I continued to challenge, I would be seen as causing my colleague to lose ‘face’ (Richards 2008; Scollon, Scollon and Jones 2011; Hwang 1987). My feelings of anxiety were rapidly increasing, my Chinese was developing slowly but not of a quality to undertake such complex communication. Overall, I felt

that something was happening within the cultural context that I was operating but which I did not understand (Liu and Sheffer 2008).

From a reflexive process, so much has become clearer. The meeting that happened in January laid the ground for some of the challenges I was facing in what appeared to be a rapidly changing cultural context. My research for the audit paper revealed a primary objective of the Chinese Education system and the relationship with the meeting in January. I discovered an academic tension between cultivating innovative and creative talent and the conflict this creates. There is recognition that thinking is normalized and that knowledge is non-dynamic within the Chinese system (Xiao-dong 2004) and the need to produce a generation of students who can 'think outside the box'. There were also papers from Chinese Universities commenting on the changes needed to UK curriculums in some subject areas to cover the 'cultivation of talent' agenda (Yuqi 2006), implying that the UK Higher Education system also needs amendment. This coincides with the discourse of academic sovereignty and almost a battle for which is correct.

I mentioned earlier about the setting up of Party Offices in universities to oversee the curriculum teaching and the tension between creativity and innovation and control of education becomes clearer. My whole perspective of what was happening and how this particular policy of Cultivation of Talent, which encompasses Internationalisation, had set up a chain of actions and reactions since the start of the year had changed. These were heavy issues to negotiated through, when the responsibility for UK academic quality standards is an ultimate performance measure.

Language is all-powerful, and in the main, in a professional environment, it is usually a hidden inequality, as people patiently try to understand each other. However, looking back at Entry 3 and now considering this Chapter, there appears to be an escalation in the negative use of language, almost a micro-aggressive act of power (Misiaszek 2017). The use of Chinese and the need to engage in multiple translations in an environment that was short of those skills created additional pressure and feelings of worthlessness. The pay discrepancy exacerbated the situation questioning the term 'Foreign Expert', and bringing my worthiness of the title into question. My failure was not appreciating that along with a very different social culture there was also a very different academic culture, which was in itself changing rapidly. This appeared to leave less space within the institution for the two cultures to merge into a peaceful harmony.

The policy of Cultivation of Talent also links back to Entry 2 and the Learning and Teaching Meeting. In retrospect, I had created a situation where my Chinese counterpart had lost 'face' (Blum 1997; Richards 2008; Li et al 2016). The meeting was a 'community and institutional' event. In this particular circumstance, my Chinese counterpart had put forward a University level agreed solution to implement the Government policy of developing innovation and creativity, a new module that demonstrated requirements. My comments had disrespected my colleague, by pointing out the issues students were facing. It could also be viewed as disrespecting the larger University community, who had quality assured the module, a lack of giving Face at an institutional level (Fang, 2013). Although from my perspective, not realising the context, I had treated the recommendation of including the module as a proposal rather than as an action. If the wider context were clearer, the negotiations over the issue would have been different (Nussbaum 1997).

#### **13.4 From small beginnings come bigger endings, or not...**

The final chapter, how does it all end?

Come September I had to decide whether to renew my residency permit. There was a part of me that really did not want to fail. It was a pride thing more than anything was. It meant having to tell people that I was coming home. I did not want to disappoint my family or my friends, all of whom had given so much support and encouragement.

I started the new semester, did the large introductory lecture to seven hundred and fifty students. After the lecture, based on Avatar, I received a round of applause, which is always lovely and students coming up to talk to me.

One of our new colleagues was not able to start at the beginning of the term, so I took over the teaching. I really enjoyed being back in the classroom. It always reminds one of what is important about academia as a career. It is the engagement of the students.

However, from a management perspective, many things were rapidly changing within the College, all driven by the external political process, very similar to what had also happened in UK Higher Education.

Eventually, I decided not to renew my visa and handed in my letter of resignation. I genuinely felt that I was unable to perform my role and that I was creating anxiety within myself and not enjoying my job because of it. The day I handed in my notice, I felt a massive burden falling away from my shoulders. I started the planning for repatriation, whilst hoping that I would find a job somewhere.

In my diary, I wrote....I am relieved!

Within this entry, the consequences of hidden inequalities becomes clear, that of my decision not to renew my visa. From current research, anxiety, inability to adjust and not developing networks are the key reasons for expatriation failure (Liu et al 2005; Ng et al 2006; Ramula et al 2012; Tharenou et al 2010). However, there is an added consideration that of hidden inequalities in the workplace. My reflections generated a series of questions, which form three distinct, but related areas of learning. The first is concerned with the use of titles and names, and the cultural expectations of those designations. The second is the lived experience of dealing

with cultural concepts such as 'Face' and 'Guanxi', and finally, specifically understanding intricacies of change in 'small cultures' (Moosa 2013).

The most obvious is one of language, creating an unequal power dynamic between my Chinese colleague and myself. However, there were deeper cultural issues possibly at work, which revealed hidden inequalities. The micro aggressive use of language in meetings may have been an outward demonstration of the term 'Foreign Expert'. Initially, it exposed my rudimentary grasp of Chinese and the fact that I needed people who could translate orally and in written form. This would be a demonstration of my right to such a title and the government rewards that went with it. The government-imposed use of a 'Foreign Expert' created a tension with the academia perspective of academic sovereignty. This was demonstrated through the introduction of new signage in Chinese, the appropriation of teaching space with no discussion and the remodelling of the teaching building with little UK management input.

Secondly, although understanding the concept of 'Face' and Guanxi' from an academic perspective, I learnt that the lived application is very different and much more subtle. If briefed on government policy with regard to innovation and creativity prior to the first meeting in Entry 2, I would have been able to consider the action and patiently translate the action being taken and why (Nussbaumn 1997) rather than putting myself in a position of not building a colleague's position. This is a hidden inequality, although a theoretical knowledge is good, understanding it from a lived perspective is painful and can have lasting consequences. From a cultural perspective, I did not deliver the University's expectation of Guanxi, in terms of bringing top rated UK Universities to the College. It could be that the Senior Chinese management team did interpret this as not showing Face to either the University or Government In other words I had not demonstrated gratitude for the position (Koh, 2003).

Alternatively, was it actually more to do with being in the wrong place at the wrong time? Issues with Chinese academic sovereignty and Chinese control continue to be reported in the newspapers and the tension between innovation and creativity and of academic control was being played out in the 'small culture' of the College. This is evidenced by the changing of signs, the more prominent use of Chinese in meetings, and the changing use of classrooms with no discussion. These are signs of changing academic dominance in an environment based on UK academic culture. However, without a guide, someone to help untangle what is the norm for

Chinese culture generally and what is specifically to do with the 'small culture' of this particular College and University does create its own inequalities in terms of how to respond to situations.

Ultimately I think, from a personal perspective, that the biggest hidden inequality is in the title of Foreign Expert and the privileges and expectations that surround it. As an expatriate one does not necessarily see oneself as an expert, the main reasons are to learn from the inside about another culture, to have the opportunity of really experiencing that culture. Fang (2013) suggested that if you travel to China for two weeks you feel as if you could write a book, if you go for six months you feel you could write a journal article, if you stay for longer, you realise how little you know. Although there is much research on cultural intelligence and the ability to be culturally adaptive (Ang et al 2006; 2007), it would seem this starts to develop when learning takes place in an arena that is culturally changing (Suransky and Alma 2018) and you then reflect on the experience as suggested by Ng and Earley (2006).

One of the fundamental resources that I have identified for an expatriate working aboard is the importance of a Home Country National (HCN) to help with building networks, understanding the context, understanding how to develop trust with colleagues, helping when there are limited resources (for example translating). The building of networks is important in the first instance when trying to gather information, access and make best use of resources available and with making sense overall of the situation (Liu and Shaffer 2005; Wang and Varma 2017). Expatriate support can help in spanning boundaries with other networks of expatriates and nationals to develop social networks (Liu and Shaffer 2005), but HNCs are essential in building internal networks. The tension here is the issues with disparity in pay and conditions between the expatriate and HCN (Caliguin 2015) and how the 'Expert' can reciprocate (Uhl-Bien 2000). I believe that probably the reciprocity may be in giving due respect and enhancing 'face' in terms of the HNC's multicultural understanding and experience.

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