Xin Xing
Meng Tian *Editors*

Impact on Higher Education Transformation and Leadership Development

Overseas Leadership Development Programmes for Chinese University Leaders

Springer

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Overseas Leadership Development Programmes for Chinese University Leaders

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This book is dedicated to all the Chinese higher education institution leaders who participated in the overseas leadership development programmes.

Foreword by Bailian Huang

Higher education in the Central and Western regions of China is relatively underdeveloped compared to that in the Eastern and Coastal regions. In recent years, China has been striving to combat the problem of higher education inequality across the country. Against this backdrop, *the Overseas Leadership Development Programme for Chinese Higher Education Institution (HEI) Leaders in the Central and Western Regions of China* initiative was launched in 2012. The overseas leadership development programmes were initiated by the Ministry of Education in China and co-funded by the Lee Shau Kee Foundation and the Peihua Foundation in Hong Kong. From 2012 to 2018, a total of 1,452 Chinese HEI leaders from 497 HEIs attended 66 overseas leadership development programmes in Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, the U.K., and the U.S. The overseas leadership development programmes witnessed the largest number of Chinese HEI leaders participate in overseas leadership development since 2000. The overseas leadership development programmes were designed to strengthen the leadership capacities of HEI leaders in the Central and Western regions of China. It marks a milestone in the history of China's higher education internationalisation and collaboration and HEI leaders' professional development. One question we need to ask is, what are the impacts of overseas leadership development programmes? In China as well as in other parts of the world, this question has not been satisfactorily answered. To study the impact of overseas leadership development programmes, we have to gain first-hand information from the participants, namely the Chinese HEI leaders who have attended these overseas leadership development programmes. This book details a timely study that closely examines the impact of overseas leadership development programmes from both individual and institutional perspectives. Hence, this book has both theoretical and practical implications.

The book was authored by five Chinese scholars. It is the first book published in English that has an explicit focus on the impact of overseas leadership development programmes on Chinese HEI leaders. The study lasted five years in total. The authors conducted an in-depth follow-up study on Chinese HEI leaders in the Central and Western regions who had participated in overseas leadership development programmes. The book examined the impact in the following ways. First, it covered

a variety of topics, including overseas higher education systems, tenured academics, organisational culture, the relationship between HEIs and society, HEI internationalisation, and HEI presidential leadership. Second, the research participants included Chinese HEI chairmen, presidents, vice chairmen, vice presidents, and those in other equivalent positions. These positions accounted for the majority roles of Chinese HEIs. Third, countries that provided leadership development programmes consisted of Australia, Canada, Finland, the U.K., and the U.S. Fourth, the programme themes included university governance and development, university human resource management and teachers' professional development, pedagogy in HEI and student development, quality assurance of higher education, university research and education for innovation and entrepreneurship, university strategic planning and resource allocation, and the transformation of local universities. Finally, the study covered the leadership development period from 2012 to 2018.

The book fits nicely within the East-West Crosscurrents in Higher Education series by Springer. It focuses on the impact of overseas leadership development programmes on the experience and practices of HEI leaders in the Central and Western regions of China and reflects on the interaction between Chinese and Western higher education practitioners. For higher education scholars and leaders who would like to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the current development of higher education in the Central and Western regions of China, especially the changes implemented and challenges faced by these Chinese HEI leaders, this book is a must-read. Through this book, readers will learn how Chinese HEI leaders made sense of Eastern and Western educational policies, philosophies, and concepts during and after the overseas leadership development. Readers will witness these HEI leaders' professional growth and the success of their institutional level changes as a result of overseas leadership development. Their reflections on the ideological and structural differences among various higher education systems will also be made evident. In a nutshell, this book provides readers with a wide spectrum of topics, an in-depth analysis, and insightful findings.

Based on *China's Five-year Plan and the 2035 Long-term Goal Outline*, the State Council of China (2021) aims to optimise the distribution of higher education resources and to revitalise higher education in the Central and Western regions. I believe that the key to the revitalisation of higher education in the Central and Western regions of China is human resource. HEI leaders in these regions are responsible for cultivating human resources, and overseas leadership development has been proven to be an effective tool for enhancing knowledge and developing competences. This book encapsulates empirical evidence on how Chinese HEI leaders developed their own knowledge and competences as well as led a community of experts in their HEIs after overseas leadership development. There are many lessons on the innovation and development of HEIs and the modernisation of Chinese HEI governance that can be learned in this book.

There is an old Chinese saying from 诗经 *[The Book of Songs]*, "他山之石, 可以攻玉 [use stones from another mountain to polish one's jade]". This means that criticism from others should be used to correct one's mistakes, and others' experiences and practices should be drawn upon to improve oneself (Termbases,

2021). Readers will encounter fascinating descriptions of these Chinese scholars and their relentless efforts to promote educational equity and build a bridge between Chinese and foreign higher education systems. The year 2022 will mark the 10th anniversary since the first overseas leadership development programme was launched in 2012. The publication of this book is a hallmark of this amazing journey. As a higher education scholar and a key actor in initiating the overseas leadership development programmes in China, I would like to extend my warm congratulations to all the authors. I hope that they will achieve their research aspirations, promote knowledge exchange between Chinese and overseas HEIs, and contribute to the revitalisation of higher education in the Central and Western regions of China.

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Foreword by Yuzhuo Cai

China, which has the largest higher education system and is the biggest producer of scientific articles in the world, is a point of focus with regard to global higher education. As such, China has been considered a priority in many countries' strategies on the internationalisation of higher education, and there has been increasing international research attention on both international higher education cooperation with China and Chinese higher education from international comparative perspectives. Meanwhile, China has been keen on developing world-class higher education and universities by learning from the successful experiences of advanced higher education systems, and this has led many researchers to plunge into this research area. While extant studies, in one way or another, imply that the implementation of China's international higher education cooperation with other countries and its higher education reforms brought about by learning from successful global experiences largely depends on the capacity of institutional leadership, it is rare to see research on capacity development in Chinese higher education institution (HEI) leaders, particularly with respect to learning international experiences.

This book addresses the research gap by examining one approach used by the Chinese government to enhance the capacity of HEI leaders through overseas leadership development. Specifically, the book provides detailed reports of the overseas leadership development programmes for HEI Leaders in the Central and Western regions of China, which were in operation between 2012 and 2018. In total, nearly 1500 Chinese HEI leaders from about 500 HEIs from these regions participated in over 60 leadership development programmes provided by more than 100 HEIs in eight Western countries, namely Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, the U.K., and the U.S. The book provides the most comprehensive reports on the nature of the leadership development programme, expectations/perceptions of programme participants concerning the overseas study experience, and the impact of the programmes on the learners' beliefs and work practices. Throughout the discussions on these issues, China's challenges in learning from Western higher education systems are also revealed.

As a higher education scholar engaged in research on China's higher education cooperation with Western countries and as one of the key actors in organising leadership development programmes for Chinese HEI leaders in Finland, I greatly appreciate the editors and contributors of the book for examining the experiences of the leadership development programmes from a scholarly perspective. The book makes a profound contribution to existing research knowledge on the overseas leadership development for Chinese HEI leaders and its impact on Chinese university reforms. In terms of a practical impact, the findings and insights presented in the book are not merely useful for relevant stakeholders in Chinese higher education as clearly indicated by the book, but more importantly, they also help policymakers, HEI managers, and academics from the countries (typically Western countries), which are considered as role models by China in its transformation of higher education, to initiate, develop, and/or strengthen their collaboration with Chinese HEIs. The latter aspect, concerning the relevance of using Western countries' strategies to develop Chinese HEI leaders' leadership. is not the focus of this book, and I would like to highlight it here.

Before discussing the relevance of these leadership development programmes to Western countries' Chinese cooperation strategies, one should know how such leadership development is positioned in the larger context of China's development strategy from a historical perspective. Although China already sent officials and professionals to the former Soviet Union for leadership development in the 1950s, the new era of overseas leadership development began at the start of the 1980s when China commenced its economic reform and launched an open-door policy. At that time, one challenge faced by the country was a shortage of talent, as the higher education system had been tremendously destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). As such, human resource development became a national priority. In addition to expanding and improving the domestic education system, overseas leadership development was also regarded as an effective approach for developing human resources. Initially, young students were encouraged to study abroad to pursue their academic degrees. While these students mostly studied at universities and research institutes for pure academic knowledge, there were lots of technical and management issues in economic reform practices that needed to be resolved. In response to this situation, the central authorities decided to send a number of professionals and managers from commercial and industrial enterprises to receive leadership development abroad with financial support.

Until the early 1990s, the main human resources who received overseas leadership development were professional and technical personnel, as there was a clear aim to solve the technical problems in industrial production and to learn advanced management experiences for enterprise innovation. The large-scale leadership development of administrative officials abroad began in 1993 when the central government realised that when developing a market economy, it is very important for administrative officials in different sectors and levels to update their concepts of a market economy and to know how to conduct public management in a market-oriented economy. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the initiation of overseas leadership

development of administrative officials has become a key human resource development activity in China. North America and Western Europe are the main destinations for training Chinese officials and professionals. The particular overseas leadership development programmes for Chinese HEI leaders examined in the book took place in such contexts.

Based on my experiences providing several leadership development programmes for Chinese HEI leaders and administrators in Tampere University, Finland, such programmes do not generate much financial income for the university due to heavy infrastructural costs (overhead) incurred by the university and constrained leadership development budgets from the Chinese side. However, the benefits of the leadership development extend far beyond its direct economic rewards to programme providers. Through leadership development for Chinese HEI leaders, both the institutions and even the countries in which the leadership development takes place can better implement strategies for Chinese cooperation in three ways.

First, the leadership development programmes can better help the programme-providing institutions to establish relationships with Chinese partners. The lack of trust and heavy bureaucracy in China are two major barriers for many Western universities when developing partnerships with their Chinese counterparts. Chinese HEI leaders in overseas leadership development programmes are normally decision-makers or play an important role in decision-making on institutional matters. In China, they are not easily approached, let alone engage in an in-depth exchange of ideas. However, when they attend overseas leadership development programmes as learners, they become more modest and open to different cultures and ideas. Thus, trustful relations are likely to be established between the learners and teachers from the programme-providing institutions. If the Chinese HEI leaders are convinced of the potential of collaborating with HEIs in the programme country, quick implementations can be expected.

Second, through leadership development, the host countries/institutions can largely influence China's higher education development with their best practices as well as ideas. For instance, in 2014, I coordinated a study entitled "What China Can Learn from the International Experiences of Reforms of Universities of Applied Sciences" in collaboration with both Chinese and Finnish colleagues. Through communications with our partners, the Chinese Ministry of Education decided to take Finland as a role model for China's regional university reforms. Consequently, the Ministry of Education invited Tampere University to provide leadership development for Chinese regional HEI leaders, with around 50 participants trained in Finland and nearly 100 trained in China from 2014 to 2016. By participating in different leadership development programmes, visiting Finnish HEIs, and sharing knowledge with Finnish HEI leaders and academics, the Chinese HEI leaders, as learners in the leadership development programmes, identified various merits of Finnish higher education. Consequently, many of them tried to bring the Finnish experience to China and develop joint education programmes as well as Finnish leadership development programmes for teachers in their institutions.

Third, leadership development for Chinese HEI leaders also offers a unique opportunity for leadership development providers to learn from China. As an Adjunct

Professor involved in the leadership development programmes for Chinese HEIs leaders in a Finnish university, I noted that the knowledge exchange was bi-directional. My colleagues and I, who were teaching in the programmes, were very impressed by the active interactions and high-quality discussions throughout the leadership development. To us, the learners' reflections on Finnish higher education from the perspective of Chinese higher education practitioners were very valuable. Through their feedback on our teaching, we also deepened our knowledge about Chinese higher education. Even some of our doctoral students seized the opportunity to conduct interviews with Chinese HEI leaders for their research.

While trying to call the attention of a wider range of readers to the book, I want to emphasise that it is fundamentally a collection of solid scholarly works that elucidate a rarely reported phenomenon in international literature. The book is an important source of reference for those who are investigating Chinese higher education in the global context and those who would like to leverage overseas leadership development programmes to enhance their higher education cooperation with China.

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Preface

Since the open-door policy initiated in 1978, China has gained remarkable achievements in higher education. Meanwhile, higher education has facing an unequal development between the affluent eastern and under-resourced central and western regions. In response to the acute problem of uneven and insufficient regional higher education development, in 2012, the Ministry of Education launched *Overseas Leadership Development Programmes for Chinese Higher Education Institution (HEI) Leaders in the Central and Western Regions of China.* This initiative echoed the educational development goals presented at the *18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC)*, in the *Outline of the National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020)*, and in the *Revitalization Plan for Higher Education in the Central and Western Regions (2012–2020).* Between 2012 and 2018, a total of 1,452 leaders from 497 Chinese higher education institutions (HEIs) located in 25 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities in the central and western regions of China participated in 66 overseas leadership development programmes provided by over 130 overseas programme providers in eight countries. By 2021, the number of participating institutions accounted for 18% of the total number of HEIs in China and 31% of the HEIs in underdeveloped central and western regions.

Top-level Chinese government officials have confirmed the positive impact of these overseas leadership development programmes on China's higher education development. In the 2014 overseas leadership development programmes mid-term meeting, Mrs. Yandong Liu, former member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Vice Premier of the State Council, highlighted that the overseas leadership development programmes had played a significant role in improving the HEI governance and stimulating the vitality of HEIs in China (State Council, 2014). In the 2018 overseas leadership development programmes completion meeting, Mr. Zhanyuan Du, former vice minister of the Ministry of Education, underlined that these programmes had enriched human resources for higher education think tank, played positive roles as a booster and a catalyst for the higher education reform and development, and promoted the internationalisation of HEIs in the central and western regions of China.

Empirical research on HEI leaders' overseas leadership development has been scarce in China. Due to the lack of existing research-based evidence, programme organisers in China and overseas programme providers have devised new tools and methods for the purpose of tailoring overseas leadership development programmes for Chinese HEI leaders from central and western regions. This gave us an excellent opportunity to study the programme impact on these HEI leaders' professional development and institutional level changes. This research project, titled *Impact of Overseas Leadership Development Programmes for Chinese Higher Education Institution Leaders in the Central and Western Regions of China*, is funded by National Office for Education Sciences Planning (No. CIA170270), China.

This book is one key research output from the funded project. In this book, we focus on studying the impact from the perspective of the Chinese HEI leaders who attended the overseas leadership development programmes during 2012 and 2018. The book has seven chapters in total, authored by five scholars. The contents are as follows:

Chapter "Themes, Providers, Methods, and Purposes of the Overseas Leadership Development Programmes", authored by Meng Tian, synthesised four aspects of overseas leadership development programmes: the programme providers, the pedagogical methods used, the programme themes, and purposes. Chapter "Characteristics and Leadership Development Needs of Chinese Higher Education Institution Leaders", written by Cheng Yang, explored the characteristics and leadership development needs of Chinese HEI leaders. Chapter "Perceived Understanding of Australian and Chinese Higher Education Systems: A Case Study on Australian Leadership Development Programmes", composed by Xin Xing, explored the Chinese HEI leaders' understandings of Australian and Chinese higher education systems. Chapter "Perceptions of Tenure: Faculty Development Issues in U.S. Leadership Development Programmes", co-authored by Yu Sun and Xin Xing, examined Chinese HEI leaders' perceptions of tenure in American HEIs. Chapter "Neoliberalism, Consumerism and Internationalisation: Chinese Higher Education Institution Leaders Attending the U.K. Leadership Development Programmes", written by Meng Tian, examined the impact of overseas leadership development programmes in the U.K. Chapter "Developing the Leadership of Chinese Higher Education Institution Leaders: Transformative Learning in the Third Space Through Overseas Leadership Development Programmes", authored by Ge Wei, explored the Chinese HEI leaders' leadership development after their participation in overseas leadership development programmes. Chapter "Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Overseas Leadership Development Programmes", co-authored by Meng Tian and Xin Xing, summarised four key lessons learned from the overseas leadership development programmes and proposed three recommendations for future programmes.

In this book, we systematically examined the programme impact on Chinese HEI leaders' professional and institutional development. Examples of institutional level reforms and innovations are illustrated. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data, we synthesised evidence-informed findings to illuminate future overseas leadership development programme designs, organisation, delivery and assessment. Bilateral communication and knowledge co-creation between Chinese and overseas HEIs

are essential for higher education development in both contexts. It is our hope that this book will benefit educational researchers, practitioners, programme providers, policymakers and administrators.

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Acknowledgements

Praise for *Impact on Higher Education Transformation and Leadership Development*

"This book represents an excellent contribution to research on internationalisation of higher education, leadership and organization development, and its impact on Chinese university presidents and their university reforms, genuinely building bridges between the 'East higher education' and the 'West higher education'. Based on empirical evidence, the book is a timely and systematical scholarly works to mark a decade impact of overseas leadership development programmes for Chinese university presidents. Readers thus gain vivid insights into the meanings of overseas leadership development, the interactions and dialogues between 'East' and 'West' educational philosophies, policies, and concepts through the eyes of Chinese university presidents."

—Yao Yun, *Professor of Higher Education, Beijing Normal University, China*

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About the Editors

Dr. Xin Xing is a Lecturer at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Yan'an University (China) and a Visiting Scholar at the National Academy of Education Administration (China). His main research interests are leadership development in higher education, university governance and leadership as well as education for sustainability. Xin accomplished his Master's degree at the University of Jyväskylä (Finland) and earned his PhD degree from the University of Helsinki (Finland). During spring 2016 Xin was a Visiting Graduate Researcher at the UCL Institute of Education (U.K.). He is a member of the Higher Education Leadership Branch Association, China Association of Higher Education, the Chinese Society of Academic Degrees and Graduate Education as well as the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers in Finland. Currently, he is Principal Investigator of the National Office for Education Sciences Planning, China (NOESP) project on *Impact of Overseas Leadership Development Programmes for Chinese Higher Education Institution Leaders in the Central and Western Regions of China.* Xin has been dedicated to studying quality and impact of overseas leadership development programmes for Chinese school principals and university leaders since 2011. He has published five articles, book chapters as well as one book on this topic.

Dr. Meng Tian is an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership, University of Birmingham (U.K.). Her research interests cover school leaders' professional development, distributed leadership, and leadership for social justice. Meng is Co-Convenor of the Educational Leadership Network in the European Educational Research Association. From 2019 to 2021, Meng worked as Co-Director for the Centre for Research in Education in Asia (CREA) at the University of Bath, UK. Meng accomplished her Bachelor's degree at the East China Normal University (China), and her Master's and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Jyväskylä (Finland). During her career, she has been a Researcher in several EU and international projects such as the *European Policy Network of School Leadership* (distributed leadership)

and the *International School Leadership Development Network* (leadership for social justice). As Principal Investigator, she has led the British Association for International & Comparative Education (BAICE) project on *Multi-Academy Trusts in England and Independent Schools in Finland* and the British Council project on *Leading Change Management in Educational Systems.*

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Abbreviations

AAUP	American Association of University Professors
CEAIE	China Education Association for International Exchange
DESE	Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Australia
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
MoE	Ministry of Education, China
NAEA	National Academy of Education Administration, China
NOESP	National Office for Education Sciences Planning, China
NSS	National Student Survey, U.K.
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
REF	Research Excellence Framework
TEF	Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework
THE	Times Higher Education
TNE	Transnational Education
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

List of Tables

Themes, Providers, Methods, and Purposes of the Overseas Leadership Development Programmes

Meng Tian

Abstract This chapter provides an overview of the overseas leadership development programmes for higher education institution (HEI) leaders in the central and western regions of China. Between 2012 and 2018, 13 cohorts, comprising 1,452 Chinese HEI leaders, attended 66 leadership development programmes in eight countries. This chapter synthesises four aspects of those overseas leadership development programmes: the programme themes, the programme providers, the pedagogical methods used, and purposes. Suggestions for future overseas leadership development programmes are given. This chapter serves as the foundation for the impact studies reported in the following chapters of the book.

Keywords Overseas leadership development programmes · Programme themes · Programme providers · Pedagogical methods · Programme purposes

1   Introduction

Enhancing global competitiveness and regional equality have been two major goals for the Chinese government. To balance the development of higher education within China, the *Overseas Leadership Development Programme for Higher Education Institution Leaders in the Central and Western Regions of China* was launched in 2012. These programmes were purposefully designed as part of a national education development strategy, *Revitalization Plan for Higher Education in the Central and Western Regions (2012–2020)* (Ministry of Education, China, 2013). Co-funded by the Lee Shau Kee Foundation and the Peihua Foundation in Hong Kong and administrated by the Ministry of Education (MoE), China, these programmes provided 31-days of overseas leadership development to Chinese public HEI leaders. The timeline for the original programmes was from 2012 to 2017, and it targeted the highest administrative leaders in the HEIs (i.e., the chairmen, presidents or other equivalent positions). In 2014, the programmes' mid-term evaluation conducted by the MoE, China revealed its profound and positive impact on the professional learning

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and development of the HEI leaders. Hence, the programmes were extended for one more year, until the end of 2018. The total number of participants was increased from 1,000 to 1,452. In addition to HEI chairmen and presidents, the participants in 2018 included HEI mid-level leaders, for example, directors of academic affairs (Lee Shau Kee Foundation, 2018).

Against this background, this chapter synthesises key information about the programme providers, themes, methods and purposes run between 2012 and 2018. The data comprised leadership development programme documents, timetables and participants' learning reports. Document analysis was applied to examine the programme content, themes, pedagogical methods and purposes.

The first part of this chapter presents an overview of all the leadership development programmes delivered from 2012 to 2018, including the year/cohort, the number of programmes, themes and the countries in which leadership development was delivered. The second part provides an in-depth analysis of leadership development programmes conducted in eight countries. Drawing on the participants' learning reports, the last part of the chapter looks into the content and pedagogical design of these programmes and proposes recommendations for future programmes.

2   An Overview of the Overseas Leadership Development Programmes

Between 2012 and 2018, a total of 1,452 Chinese HEI leaders from 497 HEIs in 25 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities in the central and western regions of China participated in 66 leadership development programmes provided by over 130 HEIs in Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, the U.K., and the U.S. (Lee Shau Kee Foundation, 2018; Yang, 2019) (Table 1). Each leadership development programme lasted for 31 days, which included seven days of pre-leadership development in China, 21-days of overseas residential leadership development and three days of post-leadership development feedback and dissemination back in China. The leadership development programme providers were universities and other educational organisations located in North America (Canada and the U.S.), Europe (Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and the U.K.) and Australia. Each year, between nine and 12 programmes were organised (except in 2012, when there were only five overseas leadership development programmes). On average, each programme consisted of 22 participants.

Taking a closer look at the programme themes, the most frequently repeated themes were *University strategic planning and resource allocation* (Australia, 11 times), *University governance and development* (the U.S., 9 times), and *Pedagogy in higher education institution and student development* (Canada, 8 times; Australia, 1 time). About half of the cohorts studied *University human resource management and teachers' professional development* (the U.S., 6 times), *How can higher education*

Table 1 Overseas leadership development programmes for Chinese HEI leaders 2012–2018

Year/Cohort	Programme No.	Programme theme	Country
2012 (first cohort)	1	University governance and development	U.S
	2	University strategic planning and resource allocation	Australia
	3	Quality assurance of higher education	U.K
	4	How can higher education serve local economic development	Germany
	5	University human resource management and teachers' professional development	U.S
2013 (second cohort)	1	University governance and development	U.S
	2	University strategic planning and resource allocation	Australia
	3	Quality assurance of higher education	U.K
	4	How can higher education serve local economic development	Germany
	5	University human resource management and teachers' professional development	U.S
2013 (third cohort)	1	University governance and development	U.S
	2	University strategic planning and resource allocation	Australia
	3	Quality assurance of higher education	U.K
	4	Student-centred teaching service system	U.S
	5	Educational leadership development for leaders in higher vocational education	Germany
2014 (fourth cohort)	1	University governance and development	U.S
	2	University strategic planning and resource allocation	Australia
	3	Quality assurance of higher education	U.K

Table 1 (continued)

Year/Cohort	Programme No.	Programme theme	Country
	4	Pedagogy in higher education institution and student development	Canada
	5	How can higher education serve local economic development	Germany
	6	Educational leadership development for leaders in higher vocational education	Germany
2014 (fifth cohort)	1	University human resource management and teacher development	U.S
	2	University strategic planning and resource allocation	Australia
	3	Quality assurance of higher education	U.K
	4	Student-centred teaching service system	U.S
2015 (sixth cohort)	1	University strategic planning and resource allocation	Australia
	2	University governance and student administration	U.S
	3	The transformation of local universities	Finland
	4	Pedagogy in higher education institution and student development	Canada
	5	How can higher education serve local economic development	Germany
	6	Educational leadership development for leaders in higher vocational education	Germany
2015 (seventh cohort)	1	University human resource management and teachers' professional development	U.S
	2	University governance and development	U.S
	3	Quality assurance of higher education	U.K
	4	University strategic planning and resource allocation	Australia

Table 1 (continued)

Year/Cohort	Programme No.	Programme theme	Country
	5	How can higher education serve local economic development	Germany
	6	Student-centred teaching service system	U.S
2016 (eighth cohort)	1	Pedagogy in higher education institution and student development	Canada
	2	University governance and development	U.S
	3	How can higher education serve local economic development	Germany
	4	The transformation of local universities	Finland
	5	University strategic planning and resource allocation	Australia
	6	Experience of the educational administration and governance in the universities of applied science	The Netherlands
2016 (ninth cohort)	1	Pedagogy in higher education institution and student development	Canada
	2	University human resource management and teachers' professional development	U.S
	3	University research and education for innovation and entrepreneurship	U.K
2017 (tenth cohort)	1	University research and education for innovation and entrepreneurship	U.K
	2	University governance and development	U.S
	3	The collaboration between university teaching, manufacturing and research	Germany
	4	University strategic planning and resource allocation	Australia
	5	Pedagogy in higher education institution and student development	Canada

Table 1 (continued)

Year/Cohort	Programme No.	Programme theme	Country
2017 (eleventh cohort)	1	University governance and development	U.S
	2	Pedagogy in higher education institution and student development	Canada
	3	University strategic planning and resource allocation	Australia
	4	The development of universities of applied sciences	Ireland
	5	Educational leadership development for leaders in higher vocational education	Canada
2018 (twelfth cohort)	1	Developing first-class universities and first-class disciplines	U.K
	2	University governance and development	U.S
	3	Pedagogy in higher education institution and student development	Canada
	4	University research and education for innovation and entrepreneurship	U.K
	5	Pedagogy in higher education institution and student development (for directors of academic affairs)	Australia
2018 (thirteenth cohort)	1	Developing first-class universities and first-class disciplines	U.S
	2	University human resource management and teachers' professional development	U.S
	3	Pedagogy in higher education institution and student development	Canada
	4	University strategic planning and resource allocation	Australia
	5	From teaching to learning: student-centred teaching reform (for directors of academic affairs)	Ireland

serve local economic development (Germany, 6 times) and *Quality assurance of higher education* (the U.K., 6 times).

The rest of the programme themes appear to be more cohort-specific and include *Educational leadership development for leaders in higher vocational education* (Germany, 3 times; Canada, 1 time), *University research and education for innovation and entrepreneurship* (the U.K., 3 times), *Student-centred teaching service system* (the U.S., 3 times), *The transformation of local universities* (Finland, 2 times), Developing first-class universities and first-class disciplines (the U.S., 1 time; the U.K., 1 time), *University governance and student administration* (the U.S., 1 time), *Experience of the educational administration and governance in the universities of applied science* (the Netherlands, 1 time), *The collaboration between university teaching, manufacturing and research* (Germany, 1 time), *The development of universities of applied sciences* (Ireland, 1 time) and *From teaching to learning: student-centred teaching reform* (Ireland, 1 time).

As to the programme organisation and delivery, the two organisers in China, the National Academy of Education Administration (NAEA)[1] and the China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE),[2] proposed the countries to visit, the overseas programme providers and programme themes to the MoE. Based on their proposals, the MoE made the final decisions on the themes and providers.

3 The Design, Organisation and Delivery of the Overseas Leadership Development Programmes

Document analysis of the leadership development programmes and their timetables shed light on five prominent characteristics of these leadership development programmes (Table 2).

First, regarding the programme providers, each country had at least three main providers, who worked collaboratively with other institutions to host the 21-day residential leadership development programmes. Most of the programme providers appointed by the MoE, China, were internationally prestigious universities. The programme documents revealed the reasons behind these decisions. These prestigious universities enjoy a globally renowned reputation for providing high-quality education in a wide range of disciplines. Learning about their histories, traditions and practices had the potential to broaden the horizons of the Chinese HEI leaders. Moreover, these prestigious universities have extensive networks established with

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[1] The National Academy of Educational Administration was established in 1955 and is directly under the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. It is the highest institution for training leading cadres at all levels and in all types of education. It is an important force in educational scientific research and educational decision-making and consultation in China.

[2] The China Education Association for International Exchange was established in 1981 and is directly under the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. It is a national organization for the Chinese education community to carry out non-governmental foreign education cooperation and exchange.

Table 2 A summary of the countries, themes, providers and methods of 13 leadership development cohorts in eight countries

Country	Theme	Providers	Methods
U.K	Quality assurance of higher education	10 HEIs 2 organisations	28 lectures 2 classroom observations 2 workshops 1 video tutorial 10 campus/city/company visits
U.K	University research and education for innovation and entrepreneurship	8 HEIs 2 organisations	36 lectures 1 classroom observation 2 workshops 2 campus visits 1 meeting with government officials (the mayor)
U.K	Developing first-class universities and first-class disciplines	9 HEIs 1 organisation	24 lectures 2 campus/government visits
U.S	University governance and development (east)	3 HEIs	49 lectures 4 campus visits 1 meeting with government officials
U.S	University human resource management and teachers' professional development (west)	5 HEIs	38 lectures 5 campus/company visits 1 meeting with government officials (Federal office of education)
U.S	University governance and students' affairs (east)	4 HEIs	29 lectures 7 campus visits, 2 round-table discussions, 1 forum
U.S	Student-centred teaching service system (east)	4 HEIs 2 organisations	21 lectures 4 campus visits
U.S	Developing first-class universities and first-class disciplines	4 HEIs 2 organisations	17 lectures 8 campus visits
Germany	How can higher education serve local economic development	3 HEIs	27 lectures 4 classroom observations 1 workshop, 5 campus visits
Germany	The collaboration between university teaching, manufacturing and research	3 HEIs	24 lectures 4 classroom observations 2 workshops 5 campus visits

Table 2 (continued)

Country	Theme	Providers	Methods
Canada	Pedagogy in higher education institution and student development	5 HEIs	25 lectures 4 case studies 4 workshops 7 campus visits
Australia	University strategic planning and resource allocation	3 HEIs	32 lectures 2 classroom observations 2 workshops 8 campus visits
Australia	Pedagogy in higher education institution and student development	5 HEIs	18 lectures 9 campus/government/company visits
Finland	The transformation of local universities	5 HEIs	27 lectures 7 seminars 7 city tour/ campus visits
Ireland	The development of universities of applied sciences	6 HEIs	20 lectures 6 campus/company visits 1 meeting with government officials (Irish Ministry of Education)
Ireland	From teaching to learning: student-centred teaching reform	4 HEIs	19 lectures 9 campus/company visits 1 meeting with government officials (Irish Ministry of Education)
The Netherlands	Experience of the educational administration and governance in the universities of applied science	6 HEIs	23 lectures 4 campus/institution/company visits 1 workshop 1 meeting with government officials (Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science)

other institutions, companies and local communities. Hence, it was easier to rely on their local resources to organise campus and company visits as well as city tours. Some of the main programme providers had set up administrative offices to coordinate various international visits and leadership development programmes. Having central coordination with experienced staff seemed to contribute to the success of these leadership development programmes.

Second, regarding the pedagogical methods, all the countries used a combination of different approaches, including lecturing, classroom observations, campus/lab/company visits, workshops and meetings. The most commonly used method, unsurprisingly, was lecturing. A rough count of the total numbers of lectures delivered in each programme, indicated that trainers in the Netherlands, the

U.S., the U.K. and Australia tended to use this conventional approach more often than their counterparts in Ireland, Finland, Canada and Germany. Visits were arranged to labs and companies to provide the Chinese participants with a more illustrative view of how the collaboration between university and local industries works. In addition to these traditional methods, we identified other approaches in the programmes. When attending programmes in the U.K., Germany, Australia and Finland, the Chinese HEI leaders had the opportunities to observe classroom teaching. In Canada, case studies were used for the Chinese participants to discuss and resolve particular leadership challenges that they encountered at work. In the U.K., video tutorials on the mentoring system in universities were employed as well.

Third, regarding programme content, all the providers presented their best practices for higher education development in the programmes. To varying extents and in different sequences, all the leadership development programmes covered the following key topics: To contextualize the programme, an introduction to the university's history, the university administrative structure and the relationship between the university and the society was given to the Chinese participants. For idea sharing and international benchmarking, the programme providers shared their experience of building a higher education quality assurance system, the degree accreditation system, a student evaluation system and the university staff professional title system.

Another key aspect of the programme dealt with the collaboration between education, research and industry. Visits were organised to research labs, libraries, lecture halls and companies to provide the participants with a more interactive learning experience. As the participants were Chinese HEI leaders, more concrete leadership development on strategic planning, financial management, staff development, international collaboration and the design of study programmes and curricula was provided.

Fourth, in addition to developing the professionalism of Chinese HEI leaders, the leadership development programmes served as platforms for cultural exchange and bilateral collaboration. During the 21-day residential leadership development, the Chinese HEI leaders stayed in at least two to three cities. Short visits to nearby cities were also part of the programmes. Nearly all the programmes reserved time for the Chinese participants to meet government officials (e.g., ministry administrators) from the hosting countries. This arrangement suggested that overseas leadership development programmes can achieve both educational and networking objectives. By financing and organising this large-scale leadership development, the Chinese central government has conveyed a message to the world that China is investing in the development of its central and western regions through the professionalisation of HEI leaders. Education is therefore seen as an essential national strategy for balancing China's economic development and enhancing China's global competitiveness (Liu, 2021; Yang, 2002).

Fifth, although it was not explicitly written into the leadership development programmes as a goal, many Chinese HEI leaders mentioned in their learning reports that they had built valuable networks with their overseas programme providers as well as with other Chinese HEI leaders during the learning process. The impact of leadership development appears long-lasting. Leaders from institutions that shared

similar profiles and development goals have sought further collaboration in teacher and student exchange, dual degree programmes and joint research projects. In the following chapters of this book, we will look more closely at the impact of these overseas leadership development programmes at the individual and institutional levels.

4　Suggestions for Further Development

Drawing upon the document analysis of the leadership development programmes and the Chinese HEI leaders' learning reports, this chapter proposes the following suggestions for future overseas leadership development programmes.

Regarding the programme content, some trainers from prestigious universities placed a major emphasis on their own histories, traditions and best practices. Undoubtedly, the Chinese HEI leaders found that these lectures broadened their professional horizons. However, some of the participants wished to learn more from these overseas institutions with profiles similar to their own. The Chinese organisers can consider aligning the socio-cultural context, students' needs, available resources and specialisations of the overseas programme providers with the participants' own institutions. This might better serve their learning needs than inviting world famous universities to be the main leadership development providers.

Programme method-wise, the majority of the leadership development took the form of lecturing. Chinese-English interpreters were assigned to support the learning process, and this arrangement was greatly appreciated by the Chinese HEI leaders. Nevertheless, from the participants' viewpoint, they had hoped for more interactive approaches, such as workshops, classroom observations, dialogues with governmental officials and lab/company/campus visits. Some participants preferred having in-depth discussions with the trainers in a small group rather than listening to the trainer lecturing to the whole group. To meet these needs in the future, resources, such as the number of trainers and interpreters, can be increased. It is also worth mentioning that some of the programme providers reserved time for weekly reflection and question and answer sessions. The participants found these sessions most helpful in terms of knowledge construction and dissemination.

With respect to translating the learning outcomes into practice, most participants saw it as a long process. This process started with sharing leadership development experience, observations and reflections with other leaders in the same institution. Some leaders then utilised the professional networks they had built during the leadership development programme to establish new collaborations. For instance, from 2012 to 2018, more than 300 memorandums of collaboration have been signed between the Chinese HEIs and their overseas leadership development providers as the result of the overseas leadership development programmes (Yang, 2019). Regarding the introduction of major changes to their home institutions, the Chinese HEI leaders claimed that the changes should be implemented incrementally rather than forcefully. The readiness of the leaders, teachers and staff at various levels was

a decisive factor in institutional-level changes. Hence, sending one senior leader to study abroad for three weeks was a good start, but it was not enough to form a critical mass of change agents. With the given resources, the whole top leadership team, together with some mid-level leaders, could join the overseas leadership development programme together and then design and enact changes collectively. Making real changes happen in an institution depends on change supporters who are committed to the change goals and processes.

5   Conclusion

This chapter presents an overview of the overseas leadership development programmes examined in this book. The hosting countries were mainly English-speaking countries, and many world-prestigious universities provided the leadership development. Based on document analysis, four key characteristics of these overseas leadership development programmes were summarised, namely, the status of the programme providers, the pedagogical methods, the key themes and the educational and networking purposes of the programmes. Lastly, drawing upon the participants' learning reports, some suggestions for future overseas leadership development programmes were proposed.

In the following chapters, the research team will analyse the impact of these leadership development programmes from both individual and institutional perspectives. Professional learning theories and leadership theories were applied as analytical lenses and used to open up the process and to discuss our findings in relation to earlier research studies.

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Characteristics and Leadership Development Needs of Chinese Higher Education Institution Leaders

Cheng Yang

Abstract This chapter explored the characteristics and leadership development needs of Chinese HEI leaders. Data were collected from 1,000 pre-leadership development surveys and four post-leadership development interviews. The organisational, professional, and personal needs framework was applied in the data analysis. The findings show that the HEI leaders who received the overseas leadership development programmes were mostly male and held top leadership positions as vice chairmen, vice presidents and other equivalent positions. The Chinese government expected the HEI leaders to assimilate the learnt experience from the overseas leadership development programmes and apply it in China's educational reforms and development. The professional development needs of the HEIs leaders included learning advanced concepts of higher education governance and leadership. Their personal needs included learning about the history, economic development, and culture of the host countries and acquiring new knowledge and skills to respond to a rapidly changing world. This chapter helps us to understand the realities of the overseas leadership development programmes and potential improvements for future leadership development design.

Keywords Chinese HEI leaders · Characteristics · Leadership development needs

1 Introduction

China has the largest higher education (HE) system in the world. By 30th September 2021, there were 2,756 regular higher education institutions (HEIs) in mainland China, of which 1,608 were from the central and western regions of China.[1] There

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[1] Central and western regions of China refer to 20 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous region. They include Shanxi, Henan, Anhui, Hubei, Jiangxi, Hunan, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Chongqing, Sichuan, Shaanxi, Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia.

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are two types of regular HEIs in mainland China, with 1,270 HEIs offering degree programmes and 1,486 higher vocational colleges (Educational Statistics, 2021). The number of higher vocational colleges thus exceeds the number of HEIs offering degree programmes. In terms of geographic distribution, regular HEIs in the central and western regions of China account for 54% of those in the whole country. These HEIs undertake the responsibility for providing human resources, science and technology support for the economic and social development of China, especially in the central and western regions. The expansion of HEIs has met the demand for student enrolment and has made important contributions to the massification of HE in China. Nevertheless, compared with their counterparts in the eastern region, HEIs in the central and western regions are still disadvantaged by the lack of financial and human resources. Developing HE in the central and western regions of China is a top priority of the central and local governments.

As the top decision-maker in an HEI, the leadership of the president, to a large extent, determines the quality and status of the institution. In order to develop HE and the leadership capacities of regular HEI leaders in the central and western regions, the MoE (2012) launched a series of overseas leadership development programmes from 2012 to 2018. This chapter aims to investigate the characteristics and leadership development needs of the HEIs leaders who participated in the overseas leadership development programmes. Two research questions are answered in this chapter:

1. What are the characteristics of the Chinese HEI leaders who attended 2012–2018 overseas leadership development programmes?
2. What are the Chinese HEI leaders' leadership development needs?

To accurately map Chinese HEI leaders' leadership development needs, a three-stage needs analysis was conducted before, during, and after the overseas leadership development programmes. The need analysis examined participants' organisational, professional, personal and needs. Surveying participants' needs is a prerequisite for designing the leadership development content together with overseas leadership development providers. Collecting feedback during and after the leadership development helped the organisers and providers to assess and improve the leadership development quality (Yu, 2016). Hence, the three-stage needs analysis served multiple purposes in the overseas leadership development programmes.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Characteristics of the Learners

The learners' characteristics can be analysed from two perspectives. The first perspective involves their demographic characteristics: Liu et al. (2017) divided the demographic characteristics of learners into five categories: physical characteristics, geographical characteristics, social characteristics, quality characteristics and

economic characteristics. These characteristics consist of 12 items: the physical characteristics include age and gender; the geographical characteristics include administrative region, residence and migration; the social characteristics include marriage, ethnicity and social class; the economic characteristics comprise income, occupation and industry; and the quality characteristics refer to cultural background (Liu et al., 2017). The second perspective looks into the learners' cognitive ability, self-efficacy, motivation and expectations for the leadership development (Rebecca & Eduardo, 2011). Jacques (2013) proposes another list of the learners' characteristics, including self-control, self-efficacy, organisational commitment, professional commitment and learning output.

In terms of the selection of the participants. the MoE set criteria in accord with the principle of 'fairness and openness'. The most important criteria were as follows: First, the candidate must be politically correct. Second, the candidate's work remit must be compatible with the programme theme. He or she must have been in charge of the specific work for more than six months prior to the leadership development. Third, the candidate should be no more than 50 years old. These criteria were set to ensure the participants would acquire knowledge and lead institutional changes after the leadership development.

This chapter first examined the participants' demographic characteristics (Liu et al., 2017), including personal characteristics (gender and age), geographical characteristics and socio-economic characteristics (occupation, leadership roles). I also categorised the participants according to the year they took part in the programmes and the type of HEIs they led in China.

2.2 Leadership Development Needs

A solid needs survey is a prerequisite for successful leadership development. Leadership development needs analysis is an investigation that, prior to the leadership development, determines whether the leadership development is needed, who needs it and what kind of leadership development is needed. Leadership development needs analysis is a prerequisite for determining leadership development objectives, designing leadership development content and implementing leadership development programmes (Zhao & Liang, 2010). Cong (2011) argues that the level of leadership development is determined by whether the leadership development implementation meets the needs of the participants and at what level the participants' needs are met. According to the *2018–2022 National Cadre Education and Training Plan* (2018), leadership development needs can be divided into organisational needs and professional needs. Yu (2016) proposed a leadership development needs framework of 'organisational needs, professional needs and personal needs' for leaders. Organisational needs involve the understanding and implementation of educational laws, policies and regulations as formulated by the Chinese Communist Party and government. Professional needs refer to HEI leaders' strategic thinking, comprehensive

analysis, problem-solving skills, interpretation and comprehension of policy, emergency management, communication, coordination (Li, 2017). Personal needs refer to the leadership development content and methods meeting HEI leaders' cognitive styles (Yu, 2016).

3 Methods

The chapter employed mixed methods to investigate the characteristics and needs of the Chinese HEI leaders. Data were collected from pre-leadership development surveys and post-leadership development interviews. Data collection followed three steps: First, the NAEA distributed the leadership development needs questionnaire to the HEI leaders one month prior to their overseas leadership development. The leaders returned the completed questionnaire before the deadline. Second, the NAEA conducted interviews with the leaders right after completing the overseas leadership development. Third, the NAEA carried out post-leadership development visits to collect feedback from the leaders in their institutions. All these endeavours aimed to make the overseas leadership development more targeted and effective. From 2012 to 2018, the NAEA distributed 1,181 pre-leadership development surveys and received about 1,000 responses. The NAEA also conducted in-depth interviews with 100 participants. For the purposes of this chapter, the 1000 pre-leadership development surveys were utilised and four interviews were selected for the analysis.

3.1 Pre-leadership Development Survey

Prior to the overseas leadership development, the NAEA designed questionnaires to analyse participants' interests on the leadership development themes, such as university governance structure, university development, university human resources management, teacher development, higher education quality assurance, university development planning, resource allocation, the university serving local economic development, university teaching and talent training and the transformation and development of higher education. On the basis of these leadership development themes, the NAEA and overseas programme providers jointly developed leadership development plans and discussed the design of the leadership development content. This enabled the HEI leaders to have inquiry-based leadership and use the learned knowledge to improve their leadership work. The questionnaire survey comprised two types of questions, closed and open. The closed questions mainly utilised a Likert scale to rank the level of importance of leadership development themes from very important, to important and then unimportant. The topics included university governance structure and university development, university human resource management

Table 1 Profile of the participants

No.	Role	Country visited	Type of interview	Interview time	Coding
1	President	Finland	Individual interview	2016	P-1
2	President	The U.K	Individual interview	2016	P-2
3	Chairman	Australia	Group interview	2016	C-1
4	Vice president	The U.S	Group interview	2018	VP-1

and teacher development, higher education quality assurance, university development planning and resource allocation, university services for local economic development, university teaching and talent cultivation, higher education transformation and development, innovation and entrepreneurship education, university research and internationalisation, etc. The open-ended question was 'What else would you like to include among your leadership development needs?' If multiple HEIs were interested in a certain theme, the suggested theme was also included in the overseas leadership development programmes.

3.2 Post-leadership Development Interviews

After the programmes, the NAEA held eight seminars and conducted group and individual interviews with participants between 2014 and 2018. The post-leadership interview questions were designed to elicit an understanding of whether the participants' expectations had been met, any areas of dissatisfaction and suggestions for future overseas leadership development. For the purposes of this chapter, I selected two group interviews and two individual interviews from four seminars held in 2016 and 2018 (see Table 1).

4 Findings

4.1 The Characteristics of HEI Leaders

The characteristics of the HEI leaders included the year of leadership development, their roles, gender, type of HEI they led, and the countries where they received their leadership development. From 2012 to 2018, a total of 1,452 HEIs leaders participated in 66 overseas leadership development programmes (see Table 2). In 2015, the number of participants reached 270, the highest number of the seven years. The reason for this was that 12 leadership development programmes were carried out in 2015. In 2012, the number of participants was 108, the lowest number with only

Table 2 Participants by year

Year	No. of participants
2012	108
2013	210
2014	230
2015	270
2016	191
2017	229
2018	214
Total	1,452

five leadership development programmes delivered. On average, 9–12 leadership development programmes were organised in the other years.

As to the roles of the participants, 337 were chairmen and presidents, accounting for 23.2% of all participants; 948 were vice chairmen, presidents and other equivalent positions, accounting for 65.3% of all participants; 35 were directors of academic affairs, accounting for 2.4% of participants; and the other 132 were MoE officials, accounting for 9% of the participants (see Table 3). It can be seen that the vice chairmen, presidents and other equivalent top leadership positions constituted the largest number of participants. In contrast, the directors of academic affairs possessed the smallest number of participants. The reason for this is that only two programmes for those leaders were organised in 2018, other programmes were designed for top level HEI leaders in other years.

The survey findings showed that 1,234 male leaders and 218 female leaders attended the overseas leadership development programmes respectively (see Table 4). The female leaders only accounted for 15% of the whole population. In some cohorts there was no or only one female leader. The imbalanced gender distribution was

Table 3 Participants by roles

Roles	No. of participants
Chairmen and presidents	337
Vice chairmen, vice presidents, and other equivalent positions	948
Directors of academic affairs	35
MoE officials	132
Total	1,452

Table 4 Participants by gender

Gender	No. of participants
Male	1,234
Female	218
Total	1,452

Table 5 Participants by type of regular HEIs

Type of regular HEIs	No. of participants
HEIs offering degree programmes	1,368
Higher vocational colleges	84
Total	1,452

Table 6 Participants by country

Country	No. of participants
Australia	268
Canada	195
Finland	46
Germany	225
Ireland	41
The Netherlands	19
The U.K	233
The U.S	425
Total	1,452

caused by two reasons. First, there were much fewer female leaders in Chinese HEIs compared to their male counterparts. Second, female leaders were offered fewer opportunities to attend overseas leadership development.

As to the type of HEIs from which the participants were selected, 1,452 participants came from regular HEIs. Only 84 were from higher vocational colleges (see Table 5). This suggests that the priority was given to develop regular HEIs rather than vocational colleges in the central and western regions of China, although the number of higher vocational colleges (1,486) was larger than the regular HEIs (1,270) in China.

Of the eight countries, the largest number of the Chinese HEI leaders attended leadership development in the U.S ($n = 425$, 29.3%), which was followed by Australia, U.K. and Canada (see Table 6). The smallest number of participants went to The Netherlands, with only 19 leaders, accounting for 1.3% of the whole population. This implies that there was a huge need to learn about HE models and practices in English-speaking countries.

4.2 Leadership Development Needs of HEI Leaders

4.2.1 Organisational Needs

Chinese HEI leaders' overseas leadership development served two purposes. First, it was expected to develop HEI leaders' knowledge of educational leadership and governance so that they could become change agents in their own HEIs in China.

Survey results revealed that the Chinese HEI leaders had a strong need in learning about the overseas HEI governance and quality assurance rather than acquiring an overview of different HE systems. Second, it was expected that the participants would compare educational values and practices in various countries and appreciate the Chinese way of leading and developing HE in the central and western regions.

The follow-up interviews further revealed Chinese HEI leaders' leadership development needs. As one leader said,

> The leadership development needs of HEI leaders are changing. The focus of observation has changed from physical environment, such as the university infrastructure and experimental equipment, to strategic planning and discipline construction. It is very urgent to improve the daily operation and international competitiveness of the Chinese universities. (P-1, individual interview)

Overseas leadership development should be based on the needs of the nation, the province and the HEI. To promote the development of HEIs in the central and western regions of China, one cannot simply follow the practices of HEIs in the eastern region or copy the practices of foreign HEIs. According to China's education Gini coefficient, education inequality in the central and western regions of China is more substantial than that in the eastern and coastal regions. Furthermore, this inequality is mainly caused by within-group differences rather than between-group differences. In other words, within central and western regions, there is a huge gap between the relatively advanced and the comparatively backward provinces and cities in terms of higher education provision and quality (Yang et al., 2014). The higher education development pattern mirrors the economic development pattern in China. This implies that educational resources, financial aid and investment are powerful leverage to re-balance the unequal development in higher education. It also suggests that the internal diversity of higher education development needs within the central and western regions should not be overlooked when designing leadership development programmes for HEI leaders from these areas. There was a need to combine overseas leadership development with reform and development needs in China's HE, adopting strategies that were suitable for the realities of the HEIs from central and western regions of China.

4.2.2 Professional Needs

The interviewees concluded that the overseas leadership development experience effectively enriched their professional knowledge, developed their professional capabilities, shaped their leadership styles, and cultivated professionalism. The survey results showed that the Chinese HEI leaders wanted to learn advanced educational governance concepts, improve governance practices and develop a comprehensive understanding of running HEIs. More emphasis was put on developing leadership competences in leading HEIs' daily operation and governance. By contrast, the survey data from the 2015–2016 overseas leadership development programmes showed that the Chinese HEI leaders assigned less importance to learning about building external networks and relations.

HEIs leaders saw building leadership capacity as a key factor in ensuring the healthy development of HEIs. For example, the Chinese HEI leaders who attended the 2015–2016 overseas leadership development programmes put 'leadership' as the most important area for development. In the follow-up interview, one leader pointed out how the programme had improved his job skills:

> First, the programme improved my awareness. I acquired new knowledge, new ideas, and new methods in the areas of governance philosophy, organisational culture, governance structure, faculty management, scientific research organisation, faculty development, security mechanism, etc. Second, the programme improved my work commitment. I have more enthusiasm to lead changes and innovations in my institute. (P-1, individual interview)

The leaders also said they needed to take responsibility for promoting internationalisation at their HEIs. The survey showed that a majority of participants took overseas leadership development as an opportunity for developing mutual understanding and partnership between Chinese HEIs and their foreign counterparts. One interviewee said,

> An expert I met in the programme has become the instructor of my university. As I need to improve the internationalisation of the academics, I invited the expert to work with academics of my university and conduct research at the expert's university in the U.K. (P-2, individual interview)

Both survey and interview data confirmed that the overseas leadership development programmes had satisfied the needs of the Chinese HEI leaders. Between 2012 and 2018, over 300 memorandums were signed between Chinese and foreign HEIs, and arising from these, about 40 HEIs have established close relationships involving cooperation.

From the interviews, the Chinese HEIs leaders expected to build a platform between HEIs in the central and western regions of China and foreign HEIs to strengthen long term collaboration. Doing so, more Chinese HEIs leaders can benefit from the leadership development and the knowledge acquired from the bilateral visits can be accumulated regionally.

4.2.3　Personal Needs

On the personal level, the participants underscored the need for updating knowledge and broadening horizons through overseas leadership development programmes. One interviewee said,

> We did not only want to learn about foreign HEIs, but also to study the politics, economy, and culture of the host countries. Lacking such knowledge makes it difficult to meet our leadership development needs. It may also lead to improper copying of foreign HEIs' practices, which will negatively impact the development of Chinese HE. (P-1, individual interview)

It is advisable that the Chinese programme organisers will equip participants with basic knowledge of the economy, politics and culture of the host countries prior to the training. This would make it easier for HEI leaders to process and understand

the information obtained during their overseas training. They need not only to see and hear how the foreign HEIs practices, but also to analyse the factors that affect their history, system, culture, and economy. This would help the HEI leaders form reasonable and systematic interpretations of the specific practices of foreign HEIs.

In addition, the Chinese HEI leaders expected to learn new knowledge and skills to respond to rapid changes in the world. Globalisation, digitisation, and artificial intelligence have brought more connections, changes, and unprecedented rates of development to HEIs. During the interviews, the HEIs leaders raised their demand for new knowledge and new skills through overseas leadership development. They hoped to improve their ability to respond to the new situation, to promote the reform of Chinese HE through internationalisation, and to lead innovation. One leader said in the interview,

> According to the development trend of the world and the needs of society, leaders must constantly acquire new knowledge, become familiar with new fields, and broaden horizons through overseas leadership development. (C-1, group interview)

In addition, the survey showed that the leadership development needs of HEIs leaders are changing. In 2012, the leaders assigned more importance to educational issues. However, in 2018, the leaders paid greater attention to learning about the economy, industry, and culture of the host countries. One interviewee said,

> In recent years, China has an unprecedented development, surpassing many developed countries in some fields. In terms of internationalisation, China has changed from 'passive internationalisation' to 'active internationalisation', from 'low-level internationalisation' to 'high-level internationalisation', and from 'partial internationalisation' to 'overall internationalisation'. Therefore, I think the leadership development needs of HEIs leaders must be changing over the years. (VP-1, group interview)

5   Conclusion

This chapter examined the characteristics and leadership development needs of HEI leaders in overseas leadership development programmes. A majority of the HEI leaders held leadership positions such as vice chairmen, presidents and other equivalent top level leadership positions. A vast majority of participants were male leaders. English-speaking countries such as the U.S., Australia, the U.K., and Canada were the most visited countries. 94.2% of the participants come from HEIs offering degree programmes.

The findings have several implications. First, China is preparing future HEIs leaders through overseas leadership development programmes. Some of those vice chairmen and vice presidents will advance their career (i.e. becoming chairmen or presidents) and become key change agents in the central and western regions of China. Second, the current HEI leadership teams are dominated by male leaders. There is a strong need to include more female leaders in leadership pipeline and in development programmes. Third, most leadership development opportunities were given to HEIs

that have an academic focus, namely HEIs offering degree programmes. There is a strong need to develop the capacity of leaders from the higher vocational colleges in future. Lastly, besides the prestigious universities in English-speaking countries, other countries also have outstanding HE systems and HEIs that can provide high-quality overseas leadership development programmes to Chinese HEI leaders. Diversifying overseas leadership development programme providers can greatly enrich the programme content and better serve participants' diverse needs.

In conclusion, accurate and comprehensive research on leadership development needs is the foundation for high-quality leadership development programmes. It is clear that leadership development needs analysis effectively enabled the Chinese HEI leaders to learn new theories, leadership strategies and methods from the developed countries. From the overseas leadership development programmes, they expanded horizons, improved their strategic thinking and capabilities to develop the Chinese HE system and their own HEIs. The leadership development needs of HEI leaders have practical implications for the planning of high-quality overseas leadership development programmes. First, the organisers should design the programme schedule more carefully so that both knowledge and skill training are combined. Second, the HEIs leaders should devote themselves earnestly to the overseas leadership development. These endeavors will enhance the quality of overseas leadership development programmes.

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Perceived Understanding of Australian and Chinese Higher Education Systems: A Case Study on Australian Leadership Development Programmes

Xin Xing

Abstract This chapter explores the perceptions of Chinese HEI leaders' understanding of Australian and Chinese higher education (HE) systems after attending a three-week leadership development programme in Australia. A sample of six Chinese HEI leaders was selected from leadership development programmes that took place between 2013 and 2017. Qualitative data were collected from six interviews and four learning reports. The findings show that the Australian leadership development programmes enable Chinese HEI leaders to construct their understanding of the two HE systems, which includes the physical and social environment and university governance. I argue that the programme serves as a platform to shape their understanding. This chapter is relevant for those who work with HE leadership development in both Australia and China.

Keywords Chinese HEI leaders · Perceptions · HE systems · Australia · China

1 Introduction

Since the 2000s, transnational education (TNE) has become a phenomenon of increasing interest throughout the world of higher education (HE). Different approaches to TNE have been discussed, which have included mutual understanding, skills migration, revenue generation and capacity building (Gu, 2009; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2006). The capacity building approach views TNE as a means to meet unmet demands and to help build capacity for quality HE (OECD, 2006), and this has been of particular interest in China (Ding, 2019). Australian higher education institutions (HEIs) have been actively promoting partnerships with Chinese HEIs, for example through TNE leadership development programmes. Between 2012 and 2018, Ministry of Education, China (MoE) sent 268 Chinese HEI leaders to attend 12 leadership development programmes in Australia.

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The Australian leadership development programmes are seen as part of the *overseas leadership development programmes* (MoE, 2012).

Although TNE represents a growing percentage of China's higher education conducted in host countries, research from the receiving country's perspective is significantly under-represented (Knight & Liu, 2017, p. 15). In addition, studies on the impact of the TNE programme on the HEI leaders are largely wanting. Most studies that have been done (e.g., British Council & German Academic Exchange Service, 2014; Constanze, 2010) are about university students and teachers. In relation to the impact of the Sino-Australian TNE programme, Wang's (2007) study showed that Chinese educational leaders shifted their task/directive-orientated concepts of leadership to motivation/collaborative-orientated concepts after attending an Australian leadership development programme. In a later study, Wang (2014) found that the Australian leadership development programme enabled Chinese HEI leaders to explore leadership challenges and future developments in teaching, research and HE management between China and Australia. In addition, an increasing number of studies have investigated trainees' individual reflections on their understanding of the Australian HE system and the implications for Chinese counterparts (i.e., Ding, 2010; Fang, 2005; Han et al., 2009; He, 2015; Li, 2004; Si & Hou, 2012; Yang, 2018; Zhang & Zhang, 2016; Zou, 2008). Nevertheless, the above-mentioned studies have examined only one Australian leadership development programme, and most of them focused on Chinese HEI leaders from elite Chinese HEIs. To capture the bigger picture of Chinese HEI leaders' understanding of both the Australian and Chinese HE systems, especially the perspective of those from non-elite Chinese HEIs, it is necessary to study multiple Australian leadership development programmes. Therefore, this chapter aims to fill the gap by studying the impact of several Australian leadership development programmes from the perspectives of trainees, and specifically, Chinese HEI leaders from non-elite Chinese HEIs. In this chapter, TNE refers to Australian leadership development programmes for Chinese HEI leaders. The research question is: How do Chinese HEI leaders perceive the impact of Australian leadership development programmes on their understanding of Australian and Chinese HE systems?

2 Higher Education Systems in Australia and China

In this section, I utilize the framework for 'education characteristics in three societies (agricultural, industrial and information)', as proposed by Gu and Xue (1998), to review HE systems in Australia and China. This framework includes the four categories: (1) educational ideology and content, (2) finance and property, (3) education system and governance, and (4) students and teachers. It can be seen that the term 'education systems' has broader meanings, including both the education system itself and other elements. For the purposes of this chapter, I will choose the third category and focus on the HE system and governance. The term 'HE systems' will include both the HE system and the governance.

2.1 HE Systems in Australia

According to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), Australia (2018), there are three types of HEIs in Australia: public HEIs, private HEIs, and other approved HEIs. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on the public HEIs. In 2018, there were 38 public HEIs in Australia (DESE, 2018).

The internal governance model of Australian public HEIs can be divided into two types: 'two parties' and 'three pillars'. The 'two parties' refer to the HEI council or senate, the highest administration power, and the academic committee or council, the highest academic power. The 'three pillars' include the highest decision-making body, the highest academic governance body, and the highest executive body'. The highest decision-making body of the HEI is the HEI council or senate. The president is the honorary chairman of the council. His or her main responsibility is to represent the HEI by attending external meetings and by issuing internal graduation certificates. The highest academic governance body is the academic committee or council. The executive team, represented by the vice-president, has the highest executive power to implement decisions made by the HEI council or senate (Hu & Wang, 2019).

HE in Australia has undergone profound changes since the 1980s. HE is no longer regarded as a public good, but as a market. During this change process, the role of participants in Australian HE activities has also changed: students and parents have become consumers, teachers and academic staff have become producers, and education administrators have become managers and entrepreneurs (Marginson, 1997). Since the 2000s, service delivered to the students have become an important part of the strategic planning of HEI development (Fang, 2005). Australian HEIs apply a marketing logic to guide their development in which students are a prerequisite for the survival and development of the HEI (Zhang & Zhang, 2016). The declined budgets to HEIs in Australia add to institutional pressures to diversify income, increasing international student fees (Welch, 2017), and academic performance has increasingly become characterized by a managerial audit culture (Martin-Sardesai & Guthrie, 2021).Australian universities emphasise corporate operation and ensure that the concept of 'efficient management' is deeply rooted in the minds of their staff (Fang, 2005; Si & Hou, 2012). The principles of 'performance-based management' are incorporated into staff evaluation, job promotion, rewards and salaries (Si & Hou, 2012). Resource allocation is carefully calculated. Each faculty has financial autonomy and implements its own accounting. Each member of a faculty has a clear sense of responsibility and a resource allocation. Tasks are linked to funds. When there are tasks, there are funds, and when there are funds, the corresponding tasks must be completed. The faculty thus uses its funds to control the operation of the faculty and its personnel (Han et al., 2009).

2.2   HE Systems in China

China has the largest and most diversified HE system in the world. Currently, there are four types of HEI in China: institutions providing postgraduate programmes, regular HEIs, adult HEIs and non-governmental HEIs. They are mainly administrated by two bodies: Central Ministries and Agencies and the Local Authorities. The first three types are public HEIs, while the last are private HEIs (Education Statistics, 2021b). For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on public HEIs, especially on regular HEIs. As mentioned in Chapter Two, By 30th September 2021, there were 2,756 regular HEIs in China, including 1,270 HEIs offering degree programmes and 1,486 higher vocational colleges (Education Statistics, 2021a). Of the HEIs offering degree programmes, 114 are administrated under Central Ministries and Agencies, and 1,156 are administrated under Local Authorities (Education Statistics, 2021b). In this chapter, I focus on HEIs offering degree programmes and administrated by the Local Authorities. They account for 91% of all HEIs offering degree programmes in mainland China.

There are two logics for resource allocation for HEI internal governance: one is a planned logic, and the other is a market logic. Traditionally, resource allocation in Chinese HEIs is planned logic. The whole HEI resource is like a cake where the HEI divides the cake into pieces and allocates resources to faculties. As a result, every faculty complains that there is a lack of teaching and research facilities. If the resource allocation follows the planned logic, the resources will always be inadequate. Shifting from a planned logic to a market logic involves a revolution in resource allocation (Zhou, 2020). Local HEIs could use resources to guide the various faculties to shape their own developmental paths and goals. When resources are divided according to the faculties' real needs, it will reduce any waste of resources (Lin & Li, 2018).

As Chinese HEIs are accustomed to 'planned logic' and have become used to following their superior's instructions, it limits their using initiative and innovation in HEIs and leads to an unsatisfactory situation in HEI planning: First, HEI leaders have little awareness of HEI planning. Second, there is a lack of multiple stakeholders. Third, the content of the HEI planning is insufficient. Lastly, the implementation of HEI planning is inadequate (Zhai, 2019). Furthermore, the complexity of the power distribution between political power, administration power, academic power and democratic power may weaken or even distort the original intention of the HEI planning. It can easily transform the strategy planning process into a game where every mood is watched (Chen, 2012).

In recent years, the Chinese government has put a great deal of effort into undergraduate education and talent cultivation. The most important policy is *On Accelerating the Construction of High-level Undergraduate Education and Comprehensively Improving Talent Cultivation Ability* (MoE, 2018). This policy title is shortened to the *Chinese HE 40 articles*. It has extensively re-constructed undergraduate education. For instance, Article 12 strengthens learning process management and motivates students to study actively and hard. Article 37 strengthens the responsibility of HEIs and requires HEI leaders to see undergraduate education as their job responsibility

(MoE, 2018). This policy has re-formulated HEI leaders' understanding of talent cultivation, which will be discussed further in a section of the findings.

Sun (2018) points out that the legislation supporting Chinese HEIs has been lagging behind, that current laws and regulations are out of line with society and there is lack of observation, reflection and guidance affecting practice. Recent policy is a response to these problems. For instance, the policy *Guidelines on Further Strengthening Legislation Work in HEIs* (MoE, 2020) provides ten guidelines. One of these guidelines involves improving HEIs' prevention of legal risks and a control system.

3 Methodology

This section presents the methodological approaches of the study. I used several Australian leadership development programmes to study their perceived impact on leaders' understanding of Australian and Chinese HE systems. My data collection included interviews and learning reports. The data analysis involved thematic analysis.

3.1 The Australian Leadership Development Programmes

The Australian leadership development programmes are part of the overseas leadership development programmes. From 2012 to 2018, a total of 268 Chinese HEI leaders attended 12 leadership development programmes in Australia. Those programmes were mainly offered by seven Australian HEIs. The average number of participants in each programme was around 22. Of the 12 programmes, 11 of them shared the theme 'University Development Planning and Resource Allocation', designed for university chairmen and presidents, while the theme for the final one was 'University Teaching and Talent Training', designed for the directors of academic affairs. The former was organized by the NAEA and the latter by the CEAIE.

3.2 Data Collection

The data for this chapter include six individual interviews and four learning reports. Purpose sampling was utilized to collect the data. The participants had attended one of the Australian leadership development programmes on the theme 'University Development Planning and Resource Allocation' between 2013 and 2017. Between May and December 2018, face-to-face interviews were conducted with six participants in their home institutions. The timing of the interviews was appropriate, since

the participants had completed the programme a good while before (from one to five years earlier).

Each interview lasted approximately 30–70 min. The participants shared their perspectives in a professional manner. All the interviews were conducted in Chinese, as both the researchers and the participants are native Chinese speakers. During the interviews, the researchers also asked for other types of data. Four participants shared their learning reports (compulsory homework required by the NAEA) with the author.

There were five males and one female HEI leader (aged 46–55, see Table 1). Each participant represented one HEI. At the time of data collection, two of the participants served as vice presidents, one as vice chairman and president, one as chairman, one as president, and one as general accountant. All the participants had travelled abroad earlier, and half of them had visited Australia prior to the leadership development. I provide three reasons for this choice: First, the participants represent similar provincial HEIs in the central and western regions of China, all administrated by Chinese provincial governments. They all belonged to HEIs offering degree programmes and non-elite HEIs in China. Second, they had experienced the same programme theme: 'University Teaching and Talent Training'. Of the six participants, two had been in the same group in 2015, and another two had been in the same group in 2017. Finally, they had some knowledge of Western (including Australian) HE systems. Half of them had visited abroad more than once, and half of them had visited Australia earlier.

Table 1 Profile of the participants, data and coding (Australian programmes)

No	Role	Main responsibilities	Gender	Programme time	Interview	Learning report	Coding
1	Chairman	Communist Party Branch leader	Male	2013	Yes	Yes	C-2
2	Chief accountant	Finance & audit	Male	2014	Yes	Yes	CA
3	President	Administration	Male	2015	Yes	Yes	P-3
4	Vice chairman and vice president	Personnel & teacher union	Female	2015	Yes	N/A	VCP
5	Vice president	Library & further education	Male	2017	Yes	N/A	VP-2
6	Vice president	Planning, infrastructure & logistics	Male	2017	Yes	Yes	VP-3

Note: (1) The role refers to the role held at the time of interviewing; (2) The role of chief accountant is the equivalent of the vice president

Ethical issues were carefully considered throughout the study. Before the interviews, the researchers asked every participant to sign a consent form to confirm their voluntary participation. Five participants agreed that their interviews could be recorded, but one did not agree to the recording. Therefore, the author took detailed notes during that interview. After the interviews, the author transcribed the data in Chinese and sent the transcriptions to the participants to make comments. The transcriptions were properly saved on a password-protected computer. During data reporting, the author used code names to safeguard the identities of participants.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data were analysed according to emerging themes and categories. Data analysis took the form of thematic analysis whereby themes and patterns are identified, analysed and reported (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A three-step data analysis process was followed. First, a vertical analysis was applied in which each participant's interview and learning report was analysed separately to identify their critical experiences. Initial coding of themes emerged and they were categorised around the research questions. Second, the data were analysed and sorted according to themes. Finally, the themes that had emerged from the data were re-examined and divided into two groups: (1) physical and social environment, and (2) university governance. The quotes were translated from Chinese into English by the author.

4   Findings and Discussion

This section presents findings related to the participants' perceptions of the Australian leadership development programmes and their understanding of differences in the HE systems of Australia and China.

The participants first shared their general impressions of the Australian leadership development programmes. C-2 commented, 'The learning is fruitful and the impact is significant.' P-3 wrote in his learning report, 'The leadership development has broadened my horizon, updated my concepts, clarified my future direction, and strengthened my confidence. All of these have doubled my confidence in doing future innovative work.' VP-3 wrote, 'In this world, there is no major or subject on being an HEI president. From a scholar to a HEI president, I am completely self-taught. It is difficult to govern an HEI, especially an HEI in western China. The design of the MoE's programmes is a response to this problem. I have learnt about the HE systems in Australia from multiple perspectives.'

4.1 Physical and Social Environment

All the participants enjoyed the physical and social environment at the Australian HEIs, including the learning environment and the service system.

First, the participants perceived the learning environment as relaxed. They reported that the university buildings were modern and that learning materials were up to date at Australian HEIs. The design of the buildings and facilities are 'humanized'. These features create a relaxed learning environment. VP-2 commented, 'The library is very comfortable and there are carpets are on the floor. Students can read, write, sleep, and even have a relationship there.' P-3 gave an example:

> What impressed me most was the library system. It is very modern, luxurious, and clean. The corridors are big and there are many sofas along the sides. These are called informal learning spaces…In my HEI, the building corridors are too small to put sofas there. You have to stand in the corridor while visiting a staff member's office. (P-3, interview)

As a leader who also teaches bachelor students in his HEI, VP-3 understands the needs of both teachers and students. He highlighted that the biggest difference is the 'ideas difference'. In Australia, teaching activities determine the equipment and environment; in China, it is the opposite. He was excited to show pictures of the building at the Business School at SUT to the author during the interview:

> The building looks peculiar and weird! It is full of innovation and imagination. Inside the building, there are many different shapes and fully-equipped rooms for classes and meetings. The oval classroom enables every student to participate in the class. The design of the wooden wall is well-spaced. Such a learning environment is excellent! The HEI buildings in China look like matchboxes or slightly changed matchboxes. The classroom tables and chairs are in rows and connected with each other. Even if you make a slight move, the chair will make noise. Imagining how much noise that will make in one class with 60 students? Such a noise will disturb the students' concentration and reduce their learning outcomes. (VP-3, interview)

The findings confirmed previous studies that informal learning spaces in Australian HEIs provide students with relaxed, free and convenient learning conditions (Si & Hou, 2012). The design and layout of facilities is quiet, comfortable, open and orderly, which creates an interactive and mutually-helpful learning environment (Han et al., 2009). Australian HEIs are equipped with multi-functional buildings, personalized classrooms and modern libraries (Zhang & Zhang, 2016). This can be explained by Brubacher's (2001) explanation of the meaning of free learning: students have the freedom to decide what to learn, when to learn, how to learn, and they create their own ideas.

The second aspect discussed concerned the student service system. The participants reported that Australian HEIs put students at the centre, respect the students and care about their rights and interests. The HEIs they visited have comprehensive student service systems, including teaching services, career guidance, psychological counselling and extracurricular activities.

These findings are consistent with studies showing that 'student-oriented' involves real action and is not just a slogan in Australian HEIs (Han et al., 2009). The student

affairs function is very comprehensive and detailed (Si & Hou, 2012), and services for teachers and students at the University of Adelaide are sincere and caring (He, 2015). One explanation for this is that, following market logic, students are seen as the prerequisite for the survival and development of the HEI (Zhang & Zhang, 2016).

4.2   HEI Governance

The participants compared university governance in Australia and in China, including the university mission and planning, resource allocation, talent cultivation, and legalization.

   All the participants commented that a university's mission and planning are significant aspects of university governance. They made specific comments on how the Australian leadership development programmes had improved their understanding of university mission and planning. For example, VCP commented that 'The president directly formulates university planning and the cooperation among different units is smooth in Australian HEIs'. VP-2 echoed that 'The university planning is specific. I will suggest my university formulates a 10-year university plan and makes the goals specific for different stages'. The participants also pointed out the defects of university mission and planning in China. CA commented, 'In China, university mission lacks long-term considerations, it is divorced from the practical work, and it changes with any change in the HEI leaders. This leads to little operability or guidance.' CA shared a similar view in his report:

> What impressed me most is the university's mission and planning. During the visit, I could frequently see and hear expressions of mission, vision and purposes at the Sydney University of Technology, the University of Adelaide and at the University of New South Wales. To achieve their mission, these HEIs formulate a 10-year development plan. The tasks and goals are specific, democratic, and measurable. During the lectures, the professors reference their HEI mission and show a high degree of recognition of that mission. It seems that everyone is familiar with the HEI mission and keeps it in mind… In China, the emphasis on HEI mission and planning is insufficient. The content of the HEI plan is big but empty. The mission lacks distinct characteristics. (CA, learning report)

The findings support previous studies showing that Australian HEIs use scientific planning to guide and promote HEI reforms and development (Han et al., 2009). HEI planning is widely accepted and has become a common understanding among staff (Li, 2004). This is also in line with He's (2015) study showing that the University of Adelaide's continuous development and growth is largely due to its equal emphasis on the formulation and implementation of strategic planning. In Chinese HEIs, strategic planning is more like a form or symbol: in the actual implementation, the action is completely different from the planning. This can be explained by the planned logic in Chinese HEIs, which is seen to be holding back the formulation and implementation of HEI planning (Zhai, 2019). It is also due to the complexity of the power distribution between political power, administrative power, academic power, and democratic

power, which may weaken or even distort the original intention of the HEI planning (Chen, 2012).

The participants also commented that resource allocation is vital to HEI governance. They found that Australian HEIs are becoming more entrepreneurial and internationalised, while Chinese HEIs lack global awareness, efficiency, openness, and an information infrastructure. They considered that the concept of an 'operating HEI' would be a good lesson for Chinese HEIs. CA compared the resource allocation model of Australian and Chinese HEIs:

> Australian HEIs pay equal attention to input and output. Resource allocation is widely affected by globalization, marketization, and informatization…. They have a streamlined and efficient administrative system. For instance, every staff member has a certain allocation for printing documents and is required to print double-sided…. In Chinese HEIs, there is a little awareness of cost-efficiency, there is duplication and serious waste, resulting in insufficient utilization of resources. For example, a laboratory in one HEI will not be open to another. In particular, HEIs from the western regions have the dilemma of being 'poor yet generous'. (CA, interview and learning report)

The findings confirm studies showing that resource allocation in Australian HEIs is market logic related (Zhang & Zhang, 2016). This approach emphasises corporate operation, efficiency and competition (Fang, 2005; Si & Hou, 2012), autonomy and responsibility for resource allocation (Han et al., 2009), while in Chinese HEIs, the resource allocation is by planned logic, and resources are always scarce (Zhou, 2020).

VP-3 compared the information infrastructure in Australian and Chinese HEIs:

> Australian HEIs consider information infrastructure as the 'oxygen' and invest lots of money and personnel in it. The core information governance system at the University of Adelaide is 'My Uni', where you can find almost all the materials about teaching, research, and services. With one account, students can pay the tuition fee, register for courses, take exams, give feedback, and more …. In many Chinese HEIs, the information infrastructure is isolated across different units. You need to have many accounts to log into the different systems, which do not access each other. (VP-3, interview and learning report)

These findings are in accord with other studies showing that the University of Adelaide invests heavily in strengthening its hardware and software construction of cloud services and in building an information platform for learning and management (He, 2015; Zhang & Zhang, 2016). It has adopted online learning as the core strategy for transforming teaching methods and establishing the core competitiveness of the university (Zhang & Zhang, 2016).

The participants also reported that the programme had firmed up their belief in putting the cultivation of talents at the core of the university. C-2 commented that 'all the work is for talent cultivation and this is our original aspiration'. VCP echoed this and emphasized that 'every HEI leader should seriously consider what kinds of talents can we cultivate for the nation?' VP-3 stressed that 'all that we are doing is for serving the students and teachers, including the logistics'. Two participants stated that quality assurance of teaching is very high in Australian HEIs. Students work hard to pass their courses and get their degrees; otherwise, they must pay high tuition fees to re-take the courses. As VP-2 put it:

'Loose enrolment and strict graduation' is a basic principle in Australian HEIs. Many students cannot graduate as scheduled. Compared with Australian HEIs, the graduation requirement for Chinese HEIs is lower. This makes some students lazy. The children of my friends are studying in one Australian HEI, and they get warnings on their academic performance. It will give them a lesson to study hard. (VP-2, interview)

This finding is partly supported by previous research showing that the Australian government plays a very powerful role in the quality assurance of HE (Zhang & Zhang, 2016). The University of Adelaide provides high-quality courses for students to choose from (He, 2015), the content of the teaching in Australian HEIs empha-sizes the development of students' talents and respects their interests and choices (Zou, 2008), while the course examination pays special attention to the cultivation of students' innovation and creativity and promotes the students' ability in self-analysis and problem-solving (Han et al., 2009).

The participants commented that legalization is an important mechanism by which to guarantee smooth HEI governance. They stated that the Chinese HEI is an unlim-ited liability university and carries endless responsibilities, which are endowed by the society and parents. P-3 gave an example:

I asked the lecturer: How does the Australian HEI deal with students' suicide? The answer was simple: call a policeman and the students' parents…If the same thing happens in Chinese HEIs, it will be like an earthquake…. The idea of caring for a disadvantaged group makes it impossible for an HEI to safeguard its legal rights. The HEI just spends money to buy safety. There is a big gap in the level of legalization between Australian and Chinese HEIs. (P-3, interview)

This finding is in line with Sun's (2018) claim that the construction of legislation has lagged behind in Chinese HEIs. The corresponding solution is reflected in the MoE's recent policy stating that the government will promote the establishment of a third-party mediation system, HEI liability insurance, comprehensive safety insurance, accident and injury insurance and other insurance systems that can improve the prevention, handling and risk sharing mechanisms for personal injury and accident disputes (MoE, 2020).

5 Conclusion

This chapter has studied Chinese HEI leaders' perceptions of Australian leadership development programmes as related to their understanding of Australian and Chinese HE systems. These perceptions are based on several Australian leadership develop-ment programmes rather than just one. The participants considered the physical and social environment and HEI governance as the two major aspects around which to construct their understanding of the two HE systems.

The findings confirm previous studies on trainees' perceptions of Australian HE systems and add new knowledge to an understanding of the status of governance in Chinese HEIs offering degree programmes. The diverse leadership development programmes provided an opportunity to capture the 'big picture' of the participants'

understandings. I argue that the Australian leadership development programmes serve as a platform for Chinese HEI leaders to construct their understanding of the HE systems in both Australia and China. Such an understanding will affect their future work. As VCP said, 'The leadership development is like planting a seed in my mind. I will always consider using this seed to improve my work'.

In conclusion, the Australian leadership development programmes had a positive impact on the Chinese HEI leaders' understanding of Australian and Chinese HE systems. It is recommended that the perceived impact on the Chinese HEI leaders' leadership practices be studied in the future. In other words, what kinds of leadership practice did the Chinese leaders execute after completing the Australian leadership development programmes? What kind of challenges did they face during those implementations and why? Such efforts will help us to understand better what Australian leadership development programmes can offer to Chinese HEI leaders and what they cannot.

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Perceptions of Tenure: Faculty Development Issues in U.S. Leadership Development Programmes

Yu Sun and **Xin Xing**

Abstract This chapter examines Chinese HEI leaders' perceptions of tenure in American HEIs. A sample of four Chinese HEI leaders was selected from those who attended U.S. leadership development programmes between 2013 and 2017. Data were collected through four interviews and four learning reports. The leaders spoke highly of the third-party reviews and the professionalism of the American faculties. While they misunderstood the real meaning of tenure; they admired the achievements of American HEIs in applying tenure but were concerned about difficulties in applying the tenure system in their own HEIs. They pointed out that tenure might not solve all the problems experienced in Chinese HEIs. There was a mis-comparison between elite American HEIs and non-elite Chinese HEIs due to the programme arrangements. We argue that benchmarking is needed in the future in order to match the profile of Chinese HEI leaders to appropriate universities in the U.S.

Keywords Tenure · Faculty · Chinese HEI leaders · U.S. leadership development programmes

1 Introduction

Tenure is an important mechanism in faculty development in American higher education (HE). The definition of tenure is 'status granted to an employee, usually after a probationary period, indicating that the position or employment is permanent' (Online Dictionary, 2020). It is a 'basic concept that faculty members who have served a proper period of apprenticeship shall enjoy security in their posts and be subject to removal only for "adequate cause"' (Byse & Joughin, 1959, p. v). The original purpose of tenure was to codify 'a permanent, professional relationship between

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faculty members and their institutional employers, rewarding those who fulfil the terms of their probation' (Allen, 2000, p. 96). While tenure is a central feature of famous and elite higher education institutions (HEIs), for non-elite colleges, tenure is a less researched topic. Wolf-Wendel et al. (2007) report that 'tenure appears to be a less salient issue for community college faculty than for faculty at other types of colleges and HEIs' (p. 259). Of the 62 public two-year colleges in Texas scrutinised in Waller and Davis's (2006) study, '26 institutions had some type of tenure system and 36 institutions had no official tenure systems'. Nationwide, 'to find accurate, up-to-date data on how many community colleges have a tenure system' is very difficult (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2007, p. 259). Although macroscopic data is not available, most young, part-time community college faculty members desire full-time tenure-track positions (Jacoby, 2005; Kater & Levin, 2005). Although tenure should be guaranteed by an official procedure, Olivas (2006) points out that many community colleges offer de facto tenure, which means tenure is granted based on the institution's custom or practice without an official procedure.

In China, tenure has been a hot topic for the last two decades. Currently, many Chinese research HEIs apply a tenured system for newly-employed faculty members (Lin & Xue, 2020). But what about the non-elite HEIs? What did Chinese leaders of non-elite HEIs learn of tenure from the American HEIs? How did they perceive this controversial but efficient system? How do they evaluate its shortcomings when considering applying the tenure system in China? To the best of our knowledge, there is little literature on tenure in Chinese non-elite HEIs. Therefore, this chapter provides a specific case in which Chinese HEI leaders learned of the tenure system during overseas leadership development programmes in the U.S, which are parts of overseas leadership development programmes (MoE, 2012). In this chapter, we focus on the non-elite Chinese HEIs from which our participants came.

2 Tenure in HEIs

2.1 Tenure in American HEIs

Tenure was first implemented at the University of Wisconsin in the early part of the twentieth century when 'Wisconsin at the time was a stronghold of "LaFollette progressivism," and life tenure for professors was viewed as essential if they were to be able to express heterodox views without fear of political reprisal' (Kennedy, 1997, p. 134).

In 1940, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) published its Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, which is seen as the most important document of the tenure system (Allen, 2000). In this statement, tenure is defined as 'a means to certain ends; specifically: (1) freedom of teaching and research and of extramural activities, and (2) a sufficient degree of economic security to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability' (AAUP, 1940). The AAUP

actively monitored HEIs for 'violations of tenure and academic freedom policies, and censure from the group is a substantial disincentive to cavalier institutional treatment of these matters' (Kennedy, 1997, p. 125).

But problems with tenure never end. First, the responsibility of the tenured academics is also questioned. 'Before tenure he is accountable only to his like-minded peers, after tenure he is accountable to no one, least of all the public or university supporters paying his salary' (Armey, 1995, p. 122). Post-tenure evaluation was identified as one of the most pressing needs facing higher education. Licata and Andrews (1990) reported that though 70% of the respondents indicated that a system existed on their respective campuses for formal evaluation of tenured academics, two thirds of them were "critical of post-tenure evaluation as not being effective in relationship to its purpose" (p. 47). Second, the uncapping of mandatory retirement brought financial stringency (Kennedy, 1997). Third, pre-tenure evaluation forces junior faculty to "prioritize research and grant activity over teaching and serving students" (Gonzales, 2014). This is especially inevitable in elite research universities where teaching or student-faculty relations are often described as secondary concerns (Terosky, 2005). Fourth, non-tenured positions—the by-products of the tenure system—have also become a problem. Since 1995, there has been 'a significant growth in the share of faculty members at American colleges and HEIs that are employed in part-time or full-time non-tenure-track positions' (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005, p. 647). This has happened 'due to the growing financial pressures faced by public and private HEIs, coupled with the lower cost of non-tenure-track faculty members' (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005, p. 647). The lower salaries and benefits of contingent faculty members prompts criticism (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005).

2.2   Tenure in Chinese HEIs

Originally, Chinese HEIs applied the 'public official' personnel system. Chinese HEI faculty members were seen as bureaucratic officials (Zhang, 2013). A public official cannot be fired easily, even if one should refuse to fulfil his or her appointed responsibilities (Yi, 2013). This system can be understood as a de facto tenure system, which offers faculty members lifelong positions without probation periods (Zhong & Li, 2009).

Top research HEIs have led tenure reform in China. Tsinghua University first introduced the idea of 'up or out' in 1993, but it was later defeated by a lack of support from the environment (Lv et al., 2019). Sun Yat-sen University first applied a faculty contract that distinguished between long-term and temporary employment in 2003 (Yao & Li, 2004). Peking University tried to implement a tenure system reform in 2003 but encountered very sharp criticism and desisted. However, ten years later, in 2014, when multiple HEIs in China simultaneously carried out a tenure reform, most faculty members kept silent and opted in (Lin & Xue, 2020).

Although forced to accept the tenure system, Chinese scholars have reflected in depth on tenure. Researchers question whether the American system of tenure would

match the needs of Chinese HEIs. The aim in applying the tenure system to Chinese HEIs and its by-products were examined (Yue, 2015), the reasons why the American tenure system could be applied only with difficulty in Chinese regional HEIs were investigated (Xia & Wang, 2016). Tenure system reform in China's universities contains the institutional logic of performance management, competition orientation and internationalization, and may induce potential risks such as academic utilitarianism, generalization of academic tournament and weakening of local academy (Wang, 2021). It also leads to a series of problems, including a complex game of interests among the various stakeholders, the lack of support for pre-employed teachers as well as protection for unemployed teachers, and stimulation of seeking quick success and instant benefits before tenured, and becoming lazy after tenure (Zhu, 2021). Regardless of those debates, little attention was paid to the process that Chinese HEI leaders learned of tenure, a research gap we are aiming to fulfilled in this chapter.

3   Methods

This section describes the methods applied in the study. We first introduce the U.S. leadership development programmes. The data collection included interviews and learning reports. The data analysis was done through conventional qualitative content analysis.

3.1   The U.S. Leadership Development Programmes

The U.S. leadership development programmes are part of the overseas leadership development programmes. Between 2012 and 2018, the MoE sent 425 Chinese HEI leaders to attend 20 leadership development programmes in the U.S. The themes covered included: (1) Governance structure and university development, (2) Human resources and faculty development, (3) University governance and student affairs, (4) Student-centred teaching service system, and (5) First-class university and first-class discipline construction. The first three were organised by the NAEA, and the latter two by the CEAIE. In this chapter, we focus on programmes with themes 1 and 2, both of which were organised by the NAEA. Both theme 1 and theme 2 were offered by ten U.S. HEIs (Table 1).

3.2   Data Collection

The data for this qualitative study included four individual interviews and four learning reports. Two participants attended U.S. leadership development programmes

Table 1 Themes and providers of U.S. leadership development programmes

Programme theme	Programme providers	
Human resource and faculty development	2013 UC Berkeley Pacific University California State University, Fullerton	2016 UC Berkeley UC Davis UC San Francisco UC Irvine UC Los Angeles Stanford University Golden Gate University San Jose State University
Governance structure and university development	2017 UC Berkeley UC Davis UC Riverside California State University Stanford University Golden Gate University California Institute of Technology Skyline College San Matteo college	

on the theme of 'Human resource and faculty development' in 2013 and 2016 respectively, and two took the U.S. leadership development programme on the theme of 'Governance structure and university development' in 2017 in the same group.

Between April and November 2018, *Author 2* interviewed the four participants at their home HEIs. The duration of the interviews varied from 35 to 120 *min.* All the interviews were conducted in Chinese. After the interviews, *Author 2* asked for other types of data. All the participants shared their learning reports (compulsory homework required by the NAEA) with *Author 2*.

The participants were all male HEI leaders (see Table 2). Three of them served as vice presidents, and one as vice chairman. The reason of chosen these participants

Table 2 Profile of the participants, data and coding (U.S. programmes)

No.	Role	Main responsibilities	Programme theme	Programme time	Interview	Learning report	Coding
1	Vice president	Logistics	Human resources and faculty development	2013	Yes	Yes	VP-4
2	Vice chairman	Students' affairs		2016	Yes	Yes	VC-1
3	Vice president	Logistics	Governance structure and university development	2017	Yes	Yes	VP-5
4	Vice president	Infrastructure and further education		2017	Yes	Yes	VP-6

Note: The role refers to the role held at the time of interviewing

is: They represent four similar regional HEIs in western China, all of which are administered by Chinese provincial governments. Three of them are normal HEIs and one is technological HEI.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data were initially created in Chinese and then translated into English. Protocols were created to match the themes of the programme. The authors described the phenomena and derived codes from the data. To avoid predetermined categories or theoretical views, relevant literature or theories are integrated into the discussion. The study applied conventional qualitative content analysis. The authors developed coding for categories based on the interview descriptions and the interpretation of the interview transcriptions and learning reports.

4 Findings

This section presents the findings relating to the Chinese HEI leaders' perceptions of tenure in American HEIs, and also the perceived shortcomings of tenure when they considered the application of tenure in China. It is important to highlight that the leaders interviewed came from non-elite Chinese HEIs, so the findings reflect the elite American HEIs that they visited, as opposed to the non-elite Chinese HEIs that they represented.

4.1 Third-Party Reviews and Professionalism

The Chinese HEI leaders gained a preliminary understanding of the tenure system in American HEIs during their visits and were high in their praise for its efficiency. In their view, tenure is a symbol of top HEIs, worldwide.

> After graduating and being recruited by a university, there will be six years of trial. During trial, if you cannot get the title of associate professor, or professor in some university, you have to leave. (VP-5, interview)

> (UC) Berkeley is a top university worldwide, which must maintain a high level of research. Berkeley needs outstanding talents and produces policy (tenure) to encourage outstanding talents to meet its criteria. Faculty are of a high level in general, mostly with doctoral degrees. (VP-6, interview)

Third-party reviews in the tenure system won great praise from the Chinese HEI leaders. They considered them to be impartial. The third-party reviews in tenure ensure the excellence of the HEIs. The leaders spoke much about the details of the

third-party reviews, such as the anonymous evaluations, international experts, and the standards for selection. However, their knowledge of tenure may not be entirely accurate. In the following excerpt, VP-5 talks about course selection and graduate students as being criteria for tenure. But in fact, very few PhD programmes (the top level the leaders refer to) see teaching as an important factor in a tenure review (Rothgeb & Burger, 2009).

> For training and introduction of academics, they (American HEIs) apply strict competition: tenure system. …The evaluation is not based on the HEI itself but on international peers. The HEI sends the application to international peers for reviewing. The review is selective and stressful. Once tenured, the faculty cherish their honour and thus will not procrastinate. The evaluation is comprehensive, including the course selection, the influence of research, the collaboration with other scholars, the training of graduate students. All these tie you to the 'chariot' so that you cannot stay without working. (VP-5, interview)

> In faculty employment and promotion, they (American HEIs) do a great job. The most famous is the third-party review. Your (the interviewer's) HEI evaluates faculty by itself, right? American HEIs, after selecting basic material, send material to world-wide experts… The experts anonymously review the candidates: How does the candidate rank among the discipline worldwide? Based on his background, how is his potential in future research? In fact, third-party review avoids human sophistication…. This impressed me most. Third-party review is an objective and real selection of talents. (VP-6, interview)

The leaders also praised the professionalism of the American HEI faculty highly. During the interview, they talked about professional behaviour in the teaching and service of American faculties. The following quotation illustrates the contrast between Chinese and American faculties. The professionalism of the American faculty won their very sincere approval.

> What touched me most is the professionalism of the faculty and staff. We Chinese talk about dedication, which is a very obscure concept. The Americans discuss professionalism, which refers to the spirit of the contract that they signed with the university. 'This is my position, and needless to say, I will do my best'…. We Chinese do scientific administration. We create rules to restrict people. The Americans exercise values administration. Scientific administration, such as attendance checking, is just a prop. They have a spirit of self-realization: The individual loves his job and does it well. That is self-realization. This really impressed me! We can hardly reach their standard of professionalism. For example, an instructor needs to reply to students' online questions within 24 hours, no matter how many students there are. If one does not, that will be a pedagogical catastrophe. To teach a class, an instructor needs to prepare a lecture handout. There's no ready-made handout. The instructor needs to prepare it in advance, even the small tips, and then submit it online. The content for the next class is then very clear. I think this professionalism extends to faculty promotion—the title review. (VP-6, interview)

> Participating in university planning, teacher selection, job title promotion and other processes, makes up for any lack of knowledge by the administrative staff relating to the academic field. It cultivates the teachers' sense of ownership, improves their enthusiasm, initiative and creativity, promotes academic freedom and academic autonomy, and balances the administrative power against the academic power. (VC-1, learning report)

4.2   'Moving Up or Out' Rather Than Academic Freedom

The original purpose of tenure was to guarantee academic freedom. But the Chinese HEI leaders in our study rarely understood tenure in this way. In their discussion, they seldom interpreted tenure as a 'life-long position' (终身教职), but rather as 'moving up or out' (非升即走). In the leaders' understanding, the benefit of tenure was to stimulate new faculty members to advance research productivity and to clear out those who did not match the high criteria set for research.

> A PhD. staff member who cannot fulfil the criteria (of publication) within five years will have to leave Berkeley for a lower level HEI. He/she cannot stay in Berkeley, because Berkeley is a top HEI worldwide and must maintain a high level of research. (VP-4, interview)

> We have much to learn from their (American) faculty administration and evaluation. They do a great job in the faculty promotion tunnel. If you cannot gain tenure within six years, which equals the Chinese 'public officials,' you have to leave. The evaluation includes both teaching and research. (VC-1, interview)

This misunderstanding about tenure does not imply that the leaders do not care about academic freedom. In fact, they think and talk much about academic freedom. The leaders attribute the vitality of the American HEIs to their academic freedom. Most leaders talked about the importance of faculties having autonomy in their academic affairs.

> Faculty have a high degree of autonomy in academic research. First, professors have quite a high degree of autonomy in what they study and how to study within their own academic research fields, without external rigid requirements and supervision. Second, the professor independently determines the schedule, content, etc. during teaching, in accordance with the predetermined plan, without external interference. (VP-5, learning report)

> We Chinese HEIs also declare academic freedom and a division between academic administration and executive administration. In reality the division is not well implemented. All is up to the president. American HEIs are different. Academic affairs are governed by professors. Professor committees deal with curriculum development, academic papers, and societal services. The review of the professor committee is a sign of the division between academic power and executive power. Chinese HEIs do not yet separate academic and executive affairs. In American HEIs, the power of personnel, finance, and academic affairs is all at the department level, which is an important level. In China, it is all at the HEI level. In America, the department chair is in charge of majors, curricula, student enrolment, and faculty recruitment. The relationship between the department and HEI is like a group company and its subsidiary. That makes things practical. Presidents only operate the macroscopic resources. (VP-6, interview)

The reason for the leaders not connecting tenure to academic freedom may be due to the 'public official' system in China. Prior to 2000, most Chinese HEI faculty members possessed 'public official' status, which was called the 'iron bowl'. Thus, in the view of the HEI leaders who were currently faculty members, as public officials, they had already been 'tenured'. When they looked at the tenure system, they paid more attention to the policy dealing with pre-tenure in the faculty, which is the 'up or out'.

4.3 Omitting the Shortcomings but Conscious of the Practicalities

The Chinese HEI leaders had not noticed the criticisms against tenure. This is easy to understand because few hosts would introduce the shortcomings of their system honestly to their visitors. Nevertheless, VP-5 and VP-6 mentioned the accountability issue relating to the tenured faculty. This reveals that the Chinese HEI leaders mostly gained their knowledge of tenure through the leadership development rather than through academic journal papers. Much of the controversy around tenure was ignored.

> Of course, there are some individuals who stop working after being tenured in American HEIs. But that is really few. (VP-5, interview and learning report)

Additionally, VP-5 wrote in his learning report that it was difficult for American HEIs to tackle this problem. But the neglect of the controversy over tenure does not mean that the leaders' thinking around tenure was superficial or over-simplified. In fact, the Chinese HEI leaders were very conscious of the difficulties of implementing tenure in China. They may not know much about the academic discussion around the tenure system, but they did know a great deal about their own HEIs and systems. They pointed very clearly to the setbacks of the 'public official' system. The leaders used the metaphor of an 'iron bowl' versus a 'communal pot' to express their complaints regarding the public official system.

> VC-1: Last year we revised faculty evaluation. This has to be consistent with the whole salary system.
>
> Author 2: So the reform is systematic.
>
> VC-1: It is a system which will not function if you forget any part.
>
> …
>
> Author 2: What do you think of tenure? What if it is applied in your university?
>
> VC-1: Here we still need time. Why? Because we still apply the 'public official system' which does not allow us to expel people. It is complicated. Like, Jiao Tong University (an elite university in China) takes a quick cycle. New-coming staff with doctoral degrees, if they cannot meet the criteria within several years, they have to leave. My university still cannot apply this. We can, at most, count the performance and reduce the salary. But I cannot fire people. Impossible.
>
> Author 2: Is it related to the funding sources of American HEIs?
>
> VC-1: Yes, because most (American HEIs) are funded by donation, which requires review. We Chinese HEIs are public institutions which are complex in administration. Private HEIs must be OK. (VC-1, interview)

Here VC-1 explained one reason behind teacher evaluation in American HEIs: financial pressure. This is also reflected in VP-5's learning report:

> The total amount of human resources in American HEIs is mainly determined by the HEIs' own financial resources; while the 'public official system' has top-down restrictions on the number of human resources in Chinese HEIs. (VP-5, learning report)

5   Discussion and Conclusion

The findings express Chinese HEI leaders' praise of tenure. In their view, the tenure system is a sign of efficiency and high-level functioning. The third-party review embedded in the tenure system is seen as objective and impartial. The leaders spoke highly of the professionalism of American faculty members and attributed their professionalism to the tenure system. The academic autonomy at the college level in American HEIs was seen as advanced and ensuring the personnel system, which stimulated the leaders' comparison of the Chinese and American personnel systems (Hui, 2018).

Compared with the academic freedom guaranteed by tenure, the leaders paid far more attention to the pre-tenured faculty situation. They called the tenure system 'up or out', relating to the pre-tenure situation rather than to the 'life-long position' ensured by tenure. This change in emphasis is rooted in the Chinese 'public officials' system', which has troubled HEI leaders for a long time. They saw 'up or out' as a solution for tackling the public officials' system.

Limited by the short time of their visits, the Chinese HEI leaders did not get to know the shortcomings of the tenure system or the controversies existing in American HEIs. Nevertheless, they admitted that it was difficult to tackle accountability issues in a tenured faculty in American HEIs. They also saw financial pressure as being an important reason for teacher evaluation in American HEIs. Further, they developed their in-depth understanding of tenure based on their in-depth knowledge of Chinese HEIs. Admitting the difficulties of applying the tenure system in their own HEIs, the leaders understood that the problems of Chinese HEIs are deeply rooted in a system that would not easily be changed by a single tenure.

These findings drawn from the data demonstrate that the outcomes of the U.S. leadership development programmes are basically successful. The Chinese HEI leaders who participated in the leadership development programmes gained a primary interest in and knowledge of the tenure system in America. They observed the details of the tenure system carefully. Their descriptions of third-party reviews and the American professionalism are vivid and sincere.

Although some misunderstandings about tenure existed, these can easily be corrected by follow-up reading or communication. For example, the leaders did not hear of the controversy around tenure during their visits. But once a leader has become interested in tenure, a quick literature review or report from a consulting group will help him or her understand the shortcomings of the tenure system. Another example was the use of the term 'up or out' instead of tenure. To our understanding, this is not so much the use of a wrong term but an accurate reflection of the problem of 'public officials' in Chinese HEIs. The focus on the productivity of the pre-tenured faculty members rather than on the academic freedom of tenured faculty members reflects the HEI leaders' concern about the lack of vitality in their own faculties.

The most touching point to us was how much the Chinese HEI leaders were concerned for their own HEIs. Although the theme of the interview was 'overseas leadership development', almost all the leaders talked more about their own HEIs

in China, especially in terms of the comparison between the Chinese and American situations. In another words, they compared Chinese non-elite HEIs with American elite HEIs. One reason for such a mis-comparison was the arrangement of the programme: the American HEIs they visited were mostly elite HEIs. Their observations of the American HEIs were detailed, but their memories of their own HEIs were even more comprehensive. The leaders were very conscious of the realities faced by Chinese HEIs. On the one hand, they admired the great achievements of the American HEIs, but on the other, they knew it would be difficult to apply the tenure system in their own HEIs. Furthermore, they knew that tenure would not solve all the problems experienced in Chinese HEIs. The dedication and pragmatic wisdom of the HEI leaders really impressed us.

One significant problem we noticed from the data was that of benchmarking. All the four Chinese HEIs represented were regional or non-elite HEIs with specific aims for their teaching or services. None of them were top-level research or elite HEIs in China. However, the 'American HEIs' mentioned in the data were mostly elite or top-class HEIs, such as Berkeley. This was partly due to the programme arrangements. Neither 2013 nor 2016 programme included low-level colleges as programme providers. Only the 2017 programme took baccalaureate/associates college (Skyline College) and community college (San Matteo college) into consideration. But the other reason for mismatching may be the misunderstanding of programme purpose. Leaders talked mostly of elite university such as Berkeley or Stanford even knowing they are inappropriate benchmark for Chinese regional or non-elite HEIs. Of course, there can be different aims for overseas leadership development programmes. To know about top class HEIs worldwide is a good enough purpose for a visit. But looking back to the appeals of leaders for solutions to local problems, we believe a benchmarked visit might be more relevant to their needs. In fact, whether tenure systems are beneficial for a non-elite community college is a pertinent question. Waller and Davis (2006) reported that the presence or non-presence of an institutional tenure system in Texas public two-year colleges does not affect enrolment, growth, affordability indexes, or retention rates. Therefore, this mismatching failed to provide leaders from Chinese non-elite HEIs with a thorough evaluation of the tenure system.

The importing of tenure to China is a specific example that "less prestigious and less resourced colleges follow the lead of more successful and high-status ones" (Harris, 2013). Sometimes in these imitation HEIs move away from their original mission toward norms of achievement and competence (Harris, 2013). But mass education is as important as elite education and it deserves a particular model. The American HE system is famous for its diversity in types of institution. What makes America special is not one or two top research HEIs but the cooperation of various institutions, which include private HEIs, public HEIs, liberal arts colleges, community colleges, and more. Institutional diversity "allows the system to meet the needs of a broad base of students and to achieve many of the ideals espoused and valued about higher education" (Harris, 2013). Although there certainly are differences between Chinese and American HEIs, it would not be hard to find regional HEIs in America with similar missions to the HEIs of the Chinese participants. A deliberate choice of

similarly benchmarked institutions may improve the quality of overseas leadership development programmes and provide a solid foundation for future communication and cooperation.

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Neoliberalism, Consumerism and Internationalisation: Chinese Higher Education Institution Leaders Attending the U.K. Leadership Development Programmes

Meng Tian

Abstract This chapter examines the impact of the overseas leadership development programmes delivered in the U.K. From 2012 to 2018, 233 Chinese HEI leaders visited 24 HEIs and organisations in the U.K. As one of the most popular destinations for degree education and international benchmarking, British HEIs subscribe to the ideologies of neoliberalism, consumerism and internationalisation. By visiting a wide range of British HEIs, the Chinese HEI leaders compared and contrasted two higher education systems and their underpinning values. Some best practices were adopted and adapted to serve Chinese HEI leaders' professional development and their institutional needs. Some institutional-level changes were implemented after the programme, while some contextual differences were reflected upon by the participants.

Keywords Chinese HEI leaders · Neoliberalism · Consumerism · Internationalisation · U.K. · China

1 Introduction

The U.K. higher education system has a reputation for its high quality and standards. With a number of world-renowned universities that occupying the top tier of many international league tables, such as QS, Times Higher Education (THE), and Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), the U.K. attracts international visitors to learn about U.K. universities' teaching, research, and quality assurance criteria. Between 2012 and 2018, the Chinese MoE sent 233 Chinese HEI leaders to attend leadership development programmes in the U.K. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the programme impact on these Chinese HEI leaders' professional development and how they designed and implemented organisational changes in their own institutions after attending the leadership development programmes in the U.K. This chapter also discusses the contextual differences between the British and

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Chinese higher education systems. These differences explain why certain best practices in the British HEIs cannot be directly applied to the Chinese higher education context.

This chapter consists of four parts. It starts with a brief literature review of the higher education system in the U.K. and its main features. The methodology section introduces the data collected and analysed for this chapter, including seven individual interviews, three learning reports and eight internal publications written by the participants who disseminated learning outcomes after their visits to the U.K. The findings section synthesises the programme impact on these Chinese HEI leaders' professional development and the subsequent institutional level changes they have designed and implemented. The findings also explain why certain change initiatives could not be materialised in these Chinese HEIs. The discussion section further probes into the effectiveness of the leadership development programmes.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Higher Education Degree Programmes in the U.K.

Unlike China and the U.S., the U.K. higher education system differentiates between universities and colleges. Colleges, in the British context, are further education institutions that prepare students for higher education, while universities are higher education institutions licenced to organise degree programmes and issue degrees to students. British HEIs provide a wide range of degree and diploma programmes, such as postgraduate research programmes leading to a doctorate (i.e. Ph.D.), postgraduate taught programmes leading to a master's degree, postgraduate diplomas, postgraduate certificates of education (PGCE), postgraduate professional degrees (e.g. Educational Doctorate), undergraduate programmes leading to bachelor's degree (i.e. honours, ordinary, enhanced, and intercalated first degrees), and undergraduate programmes leading to teacher qualifications (Study in UK, 2013). Undergraduate degree programmes usually last for three to four years with the third year in a placement. Postgraduate taught programmes leading to a master's degree are typically one year, while some can be extended to two years if more research elements are involved. Doctorate-level postgraduate research degree programmes normally extend over three years, or longer if the students are part-timers.

2.2 Popular Destination for International Students and Visitors

Following the U.S., the U.K. is the second most popular destination for both international students and academic visitors. In the academic year 2018/2019, 485,645 international students were pursuing higher education degrees in the U.K., accounting for over one-fifth of the whole student population (Study in UK, 2020). Over the past two decades, the number of international students has been steadily increasing. Statistics also show that international students tend to choose high-ranking universities (e.g., UCL, University of Manchester, University of Edinburgh, University of Oxford and University of Cambridge) located in major cities (e.g., London, Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow and York) in the U.K. The most popular subjects chosen by international students include business and administration, social studies, medicine, as well as creative arts (Study in UK, 2020).

It is not surprising that the list of U.K. universities with the most international students mirrors the international league tables. According to the QS World University Rankings 2020, 18 out of the top 100 universities are based in the U.K (QS, 2020). The Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings identifies 29 U.K.-based universities among the top 100 (THE, 2020). These rankings, to some extent, reflect British HEIs' quality of teaching and research as well as their graduates' employment prospects.

In addition to attracting international students who pursue a degree, British HEIs are also popular destinations for other HEI leaders to benchmark best practices for teaching, research and higher education governance and management. Benchmarking in higher education can be done in a systemic way. This entails academic visitors and HEI leaders reviewing and choosing a sample of universities as exemplars, learning about their academic and non-academic activities, examining their organisational structures, resources, and external networks, and assessing their impact on students, staff and the society at large. Based on these reviews, the benchmarkers evaluate their own resources, timelines and organisational goals to launch a systemic or partial change in their own institutions (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2011).

In addition to systemic benchmarking, international HEI leaders can also learn from British HEIs' experience and practices through short-term leadership development programmes such as the programmes we are reviewing in this book. These programmes normally provide one to three-week residential leadership development for international HEI leaders to observe British HEIs' best practices and have in-depth conversations with their counterparts in the U.K. The goal of these leadership development programmes is for participants to assess the readiness and feasibility of implementing changes in their own HEIs.

2.3 Marketisation and Students as Consumers

In the U.K., since the introduction of tuition fees in higher education in the late 1990s, seeing students as consumers has been widely adopted as an underlying principle for universities' daily operation (Bunce et al., 2017). Seeing students as consumers is tightly coupled with the neoliberal ideal of marketisation, which demands universities to deliver competitive services, employability and consumer satisfaction (Lesnik-Oberstein, 2015). In 2010, the Browne Review entitled U.K. universities to triple their annual tuition fees from £3000 to £9000 (Bunce et al., 2017). Correspondingly, the Consumer Rights Act (2015) holds universities accountable for students' rights and satisfaction as consumers. These changes created a new power relationship between universities and their student consumers (Bunce et al., 2017; Tomlinson, 2014).

Under fierce financial pressure, British HEIs have started to use marketing and branding strategies to attract more resources and students (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005; Woodson, 2013). In addition to establishing a quasi-market for higher education within the U.K., higher education marketisation and student consumerism also aim to enhance the U.K.'s competitiveness in the global market by attracting international students and disseminating economically productive knowledge that leads to students' better employability and mobility (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). As neoliberalism has tightened its grip on HEIs in many countries, benchmarking British HEIs' successful stories of elevating their international rankings and satisfying their consumers has become one of the key goals of international visitors.

2.4 HEI Quality Yardsticks: Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)

To help consumers, including both domestic and international students, to make decisions on study programmes, various league tables are used to categorise universities in the U.K. For example, the National Student Survey (NSS) draws on students' feedback on the learning content they receive and elicits students' ideas for university's future improvement. REF and TEF were introduced in 2014 and 2017 respectively, by the government of England to recognise and encourage excellence in research and teaching performance. By opting into REF and TEF, universities' performances are assessed and recognised by a Gold, Silver, or Bronze award, indicating different levels of excellence.

In addition to signposting for consumers, REF and TEF also serve as reputational yardsticks to guide the government's resource distribution and the universities' tuition fees. For example, universities that have demonstrated high research outputs, research impact and good research environments in REF tend to receive more funding and greater prestige. TEF awards are given to universities that generate excellent teaching and high numbers of graduates. According to the Universities and Colleges

Admissions Service (UCAS) (2020), publicly-funded universities with a TEF award may charge a higher tuition fee than those that opt out of TEF. Learning about quality assurance tools, such as REF and TEF, is another key area for international benchmarking.

To sum up, the U.K. aims to establish a globally reputed higher education system that attracts both domestic and international students. To achieve this goal, the U.K. government launched a series of neoliberal educational policies to encourage marketisation and student consumerism. U.K. HEIs are subject to assessment frameworks such as REF and TEF that measure research and teaching outputs and quality. Due to many U.K. HEIs' long histories and outstanding academic performance, over a dozen universities are occupying the top tiers of several international higher education league tables. All these indicators make U.K. HEIs popular destinations for overseas students, academic visitors and HEI leaders. Against this background, the MoE sent Chinese HEI leaders to attend leadership development programmes in the U.K.

3   Methodology

This chapter focuses on the impact of leadership development programmes delivered by U.K. HEIs and organisations. The reason for choosing the U.K. as a case study is that the country has participated in the programmes over the seven years. From 2012 to 2018, a total of 233 Chinese HEI leaders attended leadership development programmes provided by 24 U.K. HEIs and organisations. The programme themes consisted of: (1) Quality assurance of higher education, (2) University research and education for innovation and entrepreneurship, and (3) Developing first-class universities and first-class disciplines. In this chapter, I focus on the programmes with themes 1 and 2. By analysing the participants' reflections on the programmes and their post-leadership development work, I probe into the impact of the overseas leadership development programmes on the individual leaders and the HEIs they lead in China.

The dataset for this chapter comprises seven individual interviews, three learning reports and eight university internal publications. A semi-structured interview guide was designed for the data collection. The interview questions included: *How does the U.K. leadership development programmes impact Chinese HEI leaders' professional development? What kinds of changes have been designed and implemented by the Chinese HEI leaders as the result of their overseas leadership development? What socio-cultural factors hinder the educational changes?*

Each interview lasted for 45–60 min. Six out of the seven interviews were audio recorded and transcribed with written permissions from the interviewees (Table 1). One interviewee did not want to have the interview audio recorded but was willing to participate in the research project. Interview notes were taken by the researcher for data analysis. A thematic analysis was conducted on all the interviews, learning

Table 1 Profile of the participants, data and coding (U.K. programmes)

No	Role	Main responsibilities	Programme theme	Programme time	Interview	Learning report	Coding
1	Vice president	Teaching	Quality assurance of higher education	2012	Yes	N/A	VP-7
2	Vice president	Teaching		2013	Yes	N/A	VP-8
3	Vice president	Teaching		2014	Yes	N/A	VP-9
4	Chairman	Communist Party Branch leader		2015	Yes	Yes	C-3
5	Vice president	Research infrastructure	University research and education for innovation and entrepreneurship	2016	Yes	Yes	VP-10
6	Vice chairman	Students' affairs		2016	Yes	Yes	VC-2
7	Vice president	Teaching		2018	Yes	N/A	VP-11

Note The role refers to the role held at the time of interviewing

reports, and publications. All the participants were anonymised during the data analysis process. The Findings section presents on the five themes.

4   Findings

Compared to their counterparts in the resource-rich eastern and coastal regions of China, HEI leaders from the central and western regions tend to receive fewer opportunities for overseas leadership development. In their interviews and learning reports, several participants highlighted that the leadership development programmes in the U.K. were one of the few bespoke programmes for higher education development in the resource-poor regions.

In terms of their leadership responsibilities, the seven Chinese HEI leaders interviewed can be divided into two groups: one group led student management work and the other group took charge of teaching and research development. The two leadership development themes provided by the British HEIs were *Higher education quality assurance* and *University-based research innovation and entrepreneurship*. The interviewees found the programme themes well aligned with their leadership roles and the HEI visions. Their visits to the U.K. have exerted the following impact on their leadership work and institutions.

4.1 Keys to Success: Teacher Professionalism, Critical Thinking and Organisational Culture

When describing the key lessons they have learned from the leadership development programmes, the interviewees highlighted U.K. higher education teachers' professionalism and job commitment. Small details, such as them being 'approachable and friendly,' 'always on time' and 'extremely responsive to queries,' were repeatedly noted in the interviews and learning reports. Some Chinese HEI leaders drew a connection between U.K. higher education teachers' professionalism and their professional autonomy. One interviewee commented:

> You can tell that they (U.K. higher education teachers) are not overwhelmed by the pressure of advancing their professional titles. They do research and teaching out of passion, not just for the sake of keeping their jobs. (VP-8)

Compared to disseminating textbook knowledge, the Chinese HEI leaders observed that U.K. higher education teachers placed much emphasis on developing students' critical thinking skills. One interviewee noted:

> I often wondered how teachers in U.K. universities ignited students' learning enthusiasm. Now I understand that students need space and time to immerse themselves in a learning culture. Even though the students do not walk away with a lot of textbook knowledge, they have mastered the communication skills and a strong desire for learning. (VP-7)

One interviewee summarised three ways of leading professionals in HEIs; these were leading with leaders, leading with rules, and leading with culture. Solely relying on leaders and rules tend to erode teachers' and students' intrinsic motivation because they become passive recipients of orders and demands. He further explained:

> The ultimate art of leadership is leading with culture. There must be some teacher appraisal systems in British HEIs. However, the academic culture is an internal mechanism that cultivates teachers' job commitment. (VP-9)

Other interviewees also underlined that the leadership development programmes had exerted a direct impact on their understanding of organisational culture.

> It is the culture of being rigorous and responsible that touched me the most. I have observed how they (U.K. university teachers) taught Ph.D. students. The focus is always on making a unique contribution to the field rather than following the supervisor's research plan. (VP-8)

The interviewees also acknowledged that it normally took decades to cultivate an academic and learning culture in HEIs. Most of the British HEIs they visited were prestigious universities with a long history and an enviable reputation. These top universities easily attract most competent students and teachers from all over the world. It is not easy for Chinese HEI in the central and western regions to gain comparable reputational, human and financial resources in a short period of time. The interviewees found that one U.K. university that had a comparatively shorter history and an explicit vision on collaborating with local industries and communities was more relatable to the HEIs they led in China. Key lessons they learned from

that U.K. university included how to effectively attract local students, how to design and deliver degree programmes to serve regional economic development and how to motivate teachers to innovate in their pedagogies.

4.2 Re-configuring the Relationship Between HEIs and Society

Another theme discerned by the Chinese HEI leaders is that their understanding of the relationship between HEIs and society had broadened. Several interviewees highlighted the different positionings of higher education in the Chinese and U.K. contexts. In China, higher education is often seen as a continuation of primary and secondary education. Chinese students are used to memorising textbook knowledge and studying for tests in universities. Learning is more structured and passive. By contrast, U.K. HEIs focus more on preparing students for the job market and society. More emphasis is put on developing students' social skills and critical thinking skills.

> There is a strong culture of reading on campus. Teachers are not just teaching one textbook every semester. Students acquire a very broad spectrum of knowledge through reading. This is something we need to develop in my institution. (VC-2)

Furthermore, the interviewees noticed that the different campus layout reflected different relationships between HEIs and society in China and the U.K.

> The universities we visited in the U.K. do not have high walls to isolate the campus from the external world. If students want to play football or baseball, they play with other teams in the local community. In China, our university students are isolated from society. Everything takes place on campus. Our students have better facilities to do sports, but it feels like being on an isolated island. (VC-2)

After returning from the overseas leadership development programme, one interviewee made a change in his university to move male and female student dormitories into one building. In his interview, he recalled Chinese students' and other HEI leaders' strong resistance to his change initiative.

> I often wonder why we have to have separate male and female student dormitories in Chinese universities. In society, there are no male or female hotels. We should give students opportunities to adapt to society and learn how to resolve conflicts when living with mixed genders. It took me a few years to implement that change. Now our male and female students live in one building but on different floors. It has been a bumpy journey because some of our teachers are overprotective and conservative. Some students complained about hygiene, privacy, and safety issues. I think this is one important lesson for all our students to learn. They should learn to be more tolerant and adaptive in the society. (VC-2)

When facing change resistance within their HEIs, the Chinese HEI leaders relied on support from the university top leaders and other colleagues who shared similar visions and values. The interviewees discovered that two Chinese HEIs that had sent several top leaders to overseas leadership development programmes appeared to have

greater readiness and willingness for a systemic change. Leading institutional-level changes requires a critical mass of people to undertake change initiatives and stick to the change process, especially top-level leaders.

The Chinese HEI leaders also underlined the importance of institutionalising changes. If the change initiators stay in the same leadership positions for a number of years, they are more likely to see through the change implementation and institutionalisation process. However, this has not been the case for some HEI leaders who participated in the leadership development programmes. Three out of the seven interviewees had changed their leadership roles or responsibilities after their visits to the U.K. According to them, not having sufficient resources and time to implement a full cycle of reform in their HEIs had, to some extent, weakened the programme impact.

4.3 Strengthening Teaching Collaboration with External Partners

Another change initiated by the Chinese HEI leaders after their visits to the U.K. was promoting teaching collaboration with external partners. Two interviewees had planned to invite speakers from local companies to give lectures in their universities.

> Knowledge comes from practice. If we have a Ph.D. graduate to teach entrepreneurship, it is not as convincing as having an entrepreneur who possesses hands-on experience. We had some start-up entrepreneurs to teach in our programmes this year. However, most companies or industries we visited did not accept our invitations. (VP-9)

Echoing VP-9's experience, VP-7 underlined the importance of using government policies to enable university-industry collaboration. In the province where the Chinese HEI is located, the provincial government established a *First-class University League Table.* Establishing meaningful university-industry collaboration was one of the key goals for the university to achieve.

> To be recognised as a first-class provincial level university, we have built a university-wide student internship. Our trainee teachers spend one month in local schools as part of their teacher training. We have invited secondary school teachers to mentor our trainee teachers at the university. We also established a software lab in collaboration with local companies. Software engineers have been invited to guide students on campus. In return, we send students to their companies for internship. (VP-7)

Educational policies and the university's prestigious status were seen as useful resources for HEI leaders to persuade local companies and industries to join forces with them. The Chinese HEI leaders found that some U.K. universities of applied sciences (formerly known as polytechnics or technological universities) had more direct collaboration with industries and shared visions and missions similar to their own. Learning about how these U.K. universities established networks with local communities and industries was deemed valuable by the Chinese HEI leaders.

4.4   Promoting the Internationalisation of HEIs

The fourth change implemented by Chinese HEI leaders was promoting the internationalisation of their institutions. The interviewees were impressed by the degree of internationalisation of the British HEIs they visited. Their REF and TEF rankings were useful signposts guiding international students' and parents' choices and attracting international staff. VP-11 introduced an education export system into his own institution as a Chinese adaptation of internationalisation.

> From the leadership development, I learned that the internationalisation of higher education leads to a community of shared future. At our university, we have established four Confucius Institutes in Sri Lanka, Rwanda, the US, and the UK. Now we are soon opening the fifth one in Papua New Guinea. This means our university has Confucius Institutes on five continents. (VP-11)

Higher education-related exports and transnational education were perceived positively by all the Chinese HEI leaders in their interviews. Having a large number of international students, mobility programmes, joint degree programmes, and international research projects are indicators of high-performing HEIs in China, although the national and local level education authorities have strict regulations on which overseas HEIs are eligible for international collaboration. VP-11 used the oversea leadership development opportunity to kick-start a joint degree programme with one programme provider in the U.K.

> We visited University X during the leadership development programme. Their Vice Chancellor recently paid a visit to China. We are now further exploring the possibility of establishing a 3+1+1 joint degree programme. (VP-11)

All the interviewees preferred residential leadership development programmes in the U.K. over the more cost-effective online programmes for the reasons of having a more immersive learning experience and better face-to-face networking opportunities. Besides the formal leadership development, informal networking was an indispensable part of the experience. Campus tours, social events, group lunches, and corridor conversations were the places where informal learning and networking took place. More than half of the interviewees reported having continuing discussions with the U.K. HEIs after completing the leadership development programmes. They deemed attending overseas leadership development programmes one of the most effective ways to establish trusting partnerships with international collaborators.

5   Contextual Differences in International Benchmarking

In addition to the above-mentioned changes implemented by the Chinese HEI leaders as the result of their leadership development in the U.K., they also mentioned some contextual differences that hindered international benchmarking.

5.1 Providing Individualised Pastoral Support via a Personal Academic Tutor System

The most frequently praised practice was the individualised student support system in the U.K. HEIs. However, due to the lack of human and financial resources in the western and central regions of China, it was difficult to design a similar personal academic tutor system in the Chinese HEIs.

> I found the personal academic tutor system impressive. Every tutor supervises 2–4 students and meets them every week. Students share their learning and everyday life experiences with their tutor. The tutor listens to them and points students to certain student service providers if they need help. I think this strong tutor-tutee relationship can provide students with individualised support. But at the moment, we do not have the resources to build a similar system here. (VP-8)

Different teacher-student ratios were another reason that prevented Chinese HEI teachers from providing individualised pastoral care to the students.

> Compared to the small-sized classes (in U.K. HEIs), our teachers have 50–60 students in a classroom. It is nearly impossible to provide that much individualised guidance. (VP-10)

5.2 Providing Individualised Academic Guidance via a Supervisor System

In addition to the lack of resources for individualised pastoral care, some interviewees underscored the different practices involved in the provision of academic guidance to Ph.D. students in the U.K. and China. Here, the differences mainly manifested in the supervisor-Ph.D. student relationship and expectations.

> In the U.K. HEIs, Ph.D. students have to independently design and conduct their research projects. The role of the supervisor is to ensure that Ph.D. students conduct rigorous and ethical research. There is less emphasis and pressure on how many papers a Ph.D. student has to publish in core journals in the U.K. (VP-8)

By contrast, both Chinese university teachers and students are under huge pressure to publish papers in high-impact scientific journals as part of their career progression and Ph.D. studies. Although publishing research outputs in peer-reviewed journals is a relatively objective and effective way to assess a scholar's research achievement, this publish or perish culture tends to add stress to students' natural learning curves and weaken the supervisor-supervisee relationship.

Another interviewee observed the difference between process-based and results-based quality control for Ph.D. theses.

> To conduct a Ph.D. thesis in the U.K., the student has to go through several checkpoints. The supervisor is heavily involved in each step. After receiving feedback from the supervisor, the Ph.D. student has to correct mistakes. It is not easy to obtain a degree from U.K. HEIs. It is hard to articulate my observations, but I found this is a very good system because it gives Ph.D. students the autonomy but also controls the quality they deliver. (VP-10)

According to the interviewees, some quality control and assurance measures have been established in the Chinese HEIs, but there is a strong emphasis on outputs, such as conducting random checks and blind reviews of master's and Ph.D. theses to detect plagiarism, ghost-writing, and other forms of academic misconduct.

5.3   *Consumerism-Oriented Student Leadership*

The last contextual difference detected by the Chinese HEI leaders is the role of the students in the HEIs in the two countries. Student unions as well as other student-organised societies form a strong foundation for student leadership in the U.K. This is coupled with the TEF, NSS and other student satisfaction assessments. Making students satisfied has been a pronounced value underpinning the higher education system in the U.K. One interviewee commented:

> There is a national level service taking care of students' complaints and satisfaction. The purpose is to provide the best possible service to the students. In addition, the TEF is an effective tool to assess teachers and universities. (C-3)

Consumerism was perceived positively by the Chinese HEI leaders in the interviews, as it appeared to give more agency to the students and held universities accountable for the teaching quality. Currently, according to the interviewees, students in Chinese HEIs remain passive recipients of HEI leaders' and teachers' leadership. Student representatives participate in certain decision-making processes and lead some student activities. However, the concept of students as consumers is not rooted in the Chinese higher education system. Chinese HEIs are perceived as knowledge factories rather than service providers.

6   Discussion and Conclusion

There are two agendas guiding the development of higher education system in China: one is establishing world-class universities, and the other is bridging the quality gap between eastern and central-western regions. This chapter examines the impact of the overseas leadership development programmes provided by U.K. HEIs and organisations. These programmes were designed to serve the second agenda, which is enhancing higher education equality and HEI leaders' professional development in the less affluent regions.

International benchmarking has been used as a strategy to achieve this goal. From 2012 to 2018, more resources were given to HEIs in the central and western regions. As with any other transnational policy and practice benchmarking, it was widely acknowledged by the programme organisers, providers and HEI leaders that the best practices demonstrated by British HEIs should not be taken at face value. The follow-up research conducted has enabled us to identify the training impact on both

individual and institutional levels. Illustrated by the findings presented above, some of the lessons learned have been translated into institutional-level changes, while some observations enabled HEI leaders to reflect on the contextual differences between the two countries. Below, I will discuss the findings in relation to the bigger picture of Chinese higher education development and internationalisation.

First, the Chinese government has set the following five key points for HEI development: 'improving the qualifications of academics, cultivating students to be innovative, enhancing research, inheriting Chinese culture, and encouraging technological transfer' (Song, 2018, p. 734). Correspondingly, the leadership development programme themes and content designed by the U.K. programme providers covered four out of the five areas, with the exception of the inheriting Chinese culture element. According to the interviews and learning reports, the Chinese HEI leaders believed that various university league tables as well as the TEF and REF awards had enhanced British HEIs' prestige and international attractiveness. Aiming for higher rankings in global university league tables seems to be a shared goal by most Chinese HEIs and their overseas counterparts (Deem et al., 2008). Although many scholars are critical of the obsession with higher education rankings, it is hard to deny that highly ranked HEIs tend to gain more reputational, financial, and human resources. Especially in the under-resourced central and western regions of China, leaders are under huge pressure to make their institutions more entrepreneurial and innovative. Gaining external recognitions in league tables might be a useful tool to attract these resources.

Second, student consumerism is perceived positively by Chinese HEI leaders as a strategy for quality enhancement. Several interviewees mentioned two major challenges faced by HEI leaders in China: the lack of student agency and low teacher morale. It was believed that by giving students more choices and opportunities to give feedback, teaching quality and student services could be improved in Chinese HEIs. Researchers who study student consumerism in the U.K. context warn the potential harm of using transactional relationships to enhance student experience (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005; Pathan et al., 2017). They argue that this approach may force university teachers to satisfy students' needs by giving them desirable marks and force universities to invest more in the physical environment and materiality rather than in the pedagogical culture (Raaper, 2020; Tomlinson, 2017). These critiques were not mentioned by the Chinese HEI leaders in their interviews or learning reports. Instead, they underlined the individualised pastoral service, rigorous academic guidance, and powerful student unions as future development directions for their HEIs although they were currently under-resourced in their regions.

Lastly, institutional changes were implemented by combining international benchmarking with Chinese characteristics. Several Chinese HEI leaders have designed and implemented changes as a result of their leadership development in the U.K., including relocating the male and female dormitories, collaborating with local enterprises, and establishing overseas Confucius Institutes. It is worth noting that these changes were not merely a 'copy and paste' of U.K. practices. They reflected some fundamental aspects of Chinese culture, such as the division of genders in HEIs and the separation between HEIs and society. Collaboration with industry and business

sector has been a goal for many Chinese HEIs, although most HEI leaders acknowledge that bridging the gap between universities and society requires re-structuring and re-culturing their institutions (Mok, 2013). Leading with culture is deemed a more powerful tool compared to leading with leaders and rules. Visiting U.K. universities seem to have inspired these Chinese HEI leaders who later explored possibilities to invite successful entrepreneurs to their HEIs and send students to start-up companies.

Exporting Chinese culture to other countries via Confucius Institutes is a powerful way to demonstrate China's global competitiveness. This also implies that international benchmarking is not a one-way street. HEIs in the central and western regions have much potential to develop bilateral collaborations with overseas HEIs. The overseas leadership development programmes have facilitated the establishment of such partnerships, and this was deemed a strong impact by the Chinese HEI leaders.

To sum up, this chapter reviewed and examined the overseas leadership development programmes provided by U.K. HEIs and organisations between 2012 and 2018. The Chinese HEI leaders visited a wide range of HEIs in the U.K., from the top universities in international league tables to newer universities of applied sciences that collaborate closely with local business. All the Chinese HEI leaders interviewed had found the residential leadership development programmes in the U.K. impactful. At the individual level, all of them had acquired a deeper understanding of the higher education systems in the two countries. At the institutional level, some changes had been designed and implemented by merging the best practices from the U.K. with Chinese characteristics.

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Developing the Leadership of Chinese Higher Education Institution Leaders: Transformative Learning in the Third Space Through Overseas Leadership Development Programmes

Ge Wei

Abstract This chapter explores the leadership development of Chinese HEI leaders through participation in overseas leadership development programmes. Transformative learning theory and the conceptual term 'the third space' are employed to analyse three HEI leaders' perceptions of their leadership, both before, during, and after attending overseas leadership development programmes. After travelling to Canada, the U.K. and the U.S., respectively, the Chinese HEI leaders shared their learning experiences from the programmes and connected their reflections with possible leadership practices in their own HEIs within the Chinese higher education system. Qualitative data were collected and content analysis was used across the three cases. The findings show that the overseas leadership development programmes transformed their understanding of leadership from being a leader to becoming a service-provider, from being a practitioner to a reflective-thinker and from being a learner to a communicative-creator. By acknowledging the dynamic interactions between hybrid cultural forces, the overseas leadership development programmes create a third space in which Chinese HEI leaders can transform their perceptions and practices relating to their routine work. The findings confirm the value of overseas leadership development programmes and have practical implications for other countries wishing to develop their HEI leaders' leadership through intercultural exchange within formal programmes.

Keywords Leadership · Transformative learning · Third space · Overseas leadership development programmes · Chinese HEI leaders

1 Introduction

Globalisation and the evolution of the knowledge-based economy have caused fundamental changes in the functions of higher education (HE) in China. Over the past two decades, China's HE has gone through dramatic growth and multiple rounds of reform, aimed at expanding Chinese HE and developing world-class HEIs. Learning

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from the developed countries and improving the perspectives of HEI leaders is of critical importance. With the internationalisation of HE, intercultural educational exchange has become an important vehicle for facilitating a global exchange of teaching, research and service in universities (Knight, 2004). This internationalisation requires HEIs to prepare their teachers, students and institutions to operate in an increasingly dynamic, complex and competitive environment (Sanderson, 2011). In doing so, an international challenge is to develop the leadership abilities of HEI leaders to equip them to lead in today's globalised HE (Bryman, 2007; Juntrasook, 2014; Wang, 2014).

Officially initiated by the MoE, the overseas leadership development programmes aim to develop HE and the leadership abilities of HEI leaders. Their leadership may be defined as the process of administrating and coordinating HE affairs, including teaching, research, student development, social services, and logistics (Yang, 2019). In considering the impact of these programmes, certain questions need to be asked: In the context of policy, what did the Chinese HEI leaders experience during the overseas leadership development programmes? In what ways did their leadership develop after their overseas leadership development experiences? These two questions are addressed in this chapter through a cross-case qualitative analysis involving three participants.

A review of relevant theoretical literature is first introduced to undergird the chapter. In this chapter, the concept of 'HEI leaders' leadership' and the theoretical perspectives of 'transformative learning' and 'the third space' are brought together and integrated. By applying a qualitative methodology, three HEI leaders' interviews are probed using the thematic analysis method. The findings are around a focal theme involving Chinese HEI leaders' transformational leadership. Finally, the impact of the overseas leadership development programmes from the participants' perspectives is distilled to provide insights into the development of the Chinese HEI leaders' leadership.

Based on a case study of the overseas leadership development programmes, this chapter implies that intercultural exchange creates a 'third space' for HEI leaders in which to reflect on and practice their leadership. It is suggested that overseas leadership development produces embodied experiences of leadership through transformative learning in the third space and creates possibilities for making a difference in their customary work. Thus, the conclusions of this chapter may contribute to international reflection on leadership and to the HE systems of other countries.

2 Literature Review

2.1 HEI Leaders' Leadership

Leadership is defined as a process of influence in which an individual exerts intentional influence over others to structure activities and relationships within a group or

organisation (Yukl, 2002). In the context of education, Bush and Glover (2003) argue that leadership can be understood as a process of influence based on clear values and beliefs that lead to a vision for an educational institution. The vision is articulated by leaders who seek to win the commitment of staff and stakeholders to a dream of a better future for education, its students and stakeholders. In the context of HE, the leadership of the leaders is of great importance in HEIs. How the leadership abilities of HEI leaders' can be developed is a cutting-edge topic.

Similar to the present chapter, Wang (2014) investigated the experiences and perspectives of Chinese HEI leaders who participated in a two-week China-Australia Executive Leadership Programme in 2013. She found that the programme enabled the HEI leaders to explore leadership challenges and future developments in teaching, research and HE management that involved both China and Australia. This type of intercultural exchange can be an effective way in which to develop the leadership abilities of HEI leaders. More recently, Xing, in his doctoral research, showed that the leadership of HEI leaders contains four dimensions: setting directions, developing faculties, redesigning the organisation, and managing instructional programmes (Xing, 2019). These dimensions are also evident in a set of cross-national exchange programmes (e.g., Wang, 2014). However, evaluation of the development of leaders' leadership is an issue that still needs to be addressed.

In the U.S., the provision of leadership programmes assists the talented in moving up towards holding HEI presidencies. The directors of most of the major programmes in the U.S. describe their focus, curriculum, and participants' reactions. Leon (2005) highlights programmes aimed at minorities since they stand to benefit the most from them and since their participation will probably have the greatest impact in the U.S. HE. Leon mainly uses historical methods and literature analysis to evaluate various programmes aimed at the development of HEI leaders.

Watkins et al. (2011) present an evaluation model based on the theory of change approach, which identifies critical incidents leading to new behaviours and explores change at the individual and organisational levels. This evaluation model relies on repositioning management learning within leadership development programmes and incorporates theories of action and workplace and organisational learning. Watkins et al. (2011) claim that the development of leadership is a process of learning and that the learning process is largely influenced by critical incidents. This inspires me to employ certain learning theories in interpreting the development of HEI leaders' leadership abilities in the leadership development programmes.

2.2 Transformative Learning

Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991, 1997, 2000) suggests that adult learners can be transformed when critical reflection prompts a change in a previously held frame of reference (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). This learning theory has resonance with the orientation of the present chapter on changes in HEI leaders during the overseas leadership development programmes. When going through a transformative

process, adult learners adjust their frames of reference to make them more 'inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective' (Mezirow, 1997, p. 75). In this way, they are able to support the development of justified opinions that guide their actions.

In terms of the realisation of transformative learning, Mezirow (2000) suggests that transformation is initiated by experiencing a disorienting dilemma. This indicates to the individual that their currently-held frame of reference is somehow inadequate. Adopting this perspective, attention is given to transformative learning theory across the whole corpus of data by highlighting moments and experiences during the overseas leadership development programmes that may have unsettled the participants' frames of reference sufficiently to make transformation possible. It is these moments of tension, discomfort, or productive unsettling that are brought into conversation with postcolonial theories of culture and identity.

This view of learning through transformation has been employed to interpret the HEI leaders' leadership. As in Wang's (2014) study, the HEI leaders' learning, both during and after their overseas leadership development programmes, can be depicted as a transformative trajectory. The cross-border leadership development experiences enhanced intercultural learning and an understanding of foreign HE in general, and of institutional practices in the host HEI (Wang, 2014, p. 78). Thus, I decided to adopt the theory of transformative learning in conceptualizing the development of leadership in the HEI leaders.

When describing transformative learning, it is helpful to distinguish between informational learning and its opposite, transformative learning (Kegan, 2009). When someone learns information, the learning facilitates a change in 'what' they know, whereas, through a transformative learning experience, a person makes changes in 'how' they know; an epistemological shift occurs (Kegan, 2009, p. 52). Kegan (2009) asserts that both types of learning are helpful, but when thinking about transformative learning, it is imperative to understand exactly what 'form' is being transformed. In his emergent theory of transformation, Mezirow describes that transformation involves a restructuring of 'problematic frames of reference' and 'sets of fixed assumptions' (Mezirow, 2003, p. 58). Transformation is thus both an outcome and a process. Nohl (2015) summarises the process in five phases: (1) a non-determining start followed by (2) a phase of experimental and undirected inquiry, and (3) a phase of social testing and mirroring. The process is boosted during (4) a phase of shifting relevance, which finally, leads to (5) a phase of social consolidation and reinterpretation of biography (p. 39). In each phase, work is done to alter cognitive structures, which will ultimately reconfigure problematic frames of reference, making them more inclusive, flexible and reflective. Transformative learning thus describes a phenomenon in which actors reconstruct their perceptions of a certain thing and learn something totally new. This understanding of transformative learning is suitable for describing the experiences of HEI leaders in overseas leadership development programmes.

2.3 The Third Space

In the overseas leadership development programmes, the learning of the HEI leaders took place in a new environment called 'the third space'. Stemming from sociological postcolonial theory, Bhabha (2004) draws attention to the concept of a third space, a space of in-betweenness, a border zone, neither here nor there, a space whose 'most salient features are instability and lack of clarity about where one belongs and what one should be doing' (Barad, 2007; Barlow, 2007, p. 244). Using the metaphor of a stairwell, Bhabha (2004) describes the liminal space as holding tension and possibility, where 'differences overlap and displace each other and cultural values are negotiated, individuals often emerge transformed' (Barad, 2007; Barlow, 2007, p. 245). Maintaining this space as liminal 'prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities' (Bhabha, 2004, p. 5).

It is believed that the transformation towards cultural hybridity is always in transition and is always infused with traces of unequal and unstable power relations. Third spaces are full of ambivalence and contradiction and provide opportunities for initiating 'new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation in the act of defining the idea of society itself' (Bhabha, 2004, pp.1–2). It is in these third spaces that prior, binary frames of reference are sometimes cracked open.

It is important to acknowledge that Bhabha's construct of a third space has been adopted by a number of writers and in a variety of ways by different scholars. In relation to adult learning and development, Bhabha's concepts are helpful for discussing the effectiveness of overseas leadership development programmes as inherently in-between, and also in presenting moments where binary generalizations concerning East and West start to crumble, exposing, for example, the HEI leaders' assumptions and preconceptions of China and the Chinese HE system. At times, the programme participants' projections of 'westernness' infused their expectations and preconceptions, which fell short in the presence of complex, real individuals. In addition to the connections noted, overseas leadership development adds meaning and nuance to potential moments of disequilibrium that require frame of reference reorganisation (Mezirow, 1991). Attention is here drawn to the liminal spaces within the programme—spaces of unstructured learning, interaction and tension.

Closely related to the central topic of this book, Bhabha originally used the conceptualisation of the third space to illustrate how contrasting cultural experiences can combine to create a hybrid transformative space from which new understandings emerge that are not bound by any one cultural discourse. He also considers third spaces to be in-between spaces that 'provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation' (Bhabha, 2004, 1–2). A third space is in this chapter is more a metaphorical rather than a material space, within which individuals can make sense of the (sometimes competing) discourses and systems that are prevalent in the other spaces they inhabit. For example, in this chapter, when the Chinese HEI leaders visited abroad, they were positioned amidst a new place where created a third space (e.g., inter-dialogical cultures) in their mindset. At this moment, the agentive participants

should make a decision about what could they learn from the overseas leadership development programmes. Meanwhile, the decision-making and meaning-making process made their development of leadership possible. For this reason, I consider the concept of 'the third space' (Bhabha, 1990) to provide a helpful lens through which the leadership development of Chinese HEI leaders may be viewed and understood.

3 Methods

3.1 The Participants

The three Chinese HEI leaders, as the participants in this chapter, were all from Shaanxi Province, in the north-west of mainland China. Shaanxi has 110 HEIs (Education Department of Shaanxi Provincial Government, 2021). Apart from a few elite HEIs (e.g., Xi'an Jiaotong University, Shaanxi Normal University), most HEIs are governed by the Education Department of the Shaanxi Provincial Government. Supported by the MoE (2013), some of the provincially-governed HEIs in Shaanxi have an opportunity for their leaders to attend overseas leadership development programmes. The participants in the present chapter visited three different Western countries, namely, Canada, the U. K. and the U. S. They shared common backgrounds in terms of HEI type, their roles, duties and leadership development experience.

First, they represented three similar provincial HEIs from Shaanxi Province, China. Their HEIs were all administrated by the Education Department of the Shaanxi Provincial Government. Second, they were all male vice chairmen and in charge of student affairs at their HEIs. Third, it was their first time attending an overseas leadership development programme, and none of them had visited the receiving countries prior to the leadership development. Fourth, based on their interviews and reflective reports, they were all active learners and keen to learn from other cultures (Table 1).

However, their host countries and programme themes varied. Code names were used to protect the participants' privacy, and their personal details are introduced as

Table 1 Profile of the participants, data and coding (U.S., U.K. and Canadian programmes)

No	Role	Main responsibilities	Country visited	Programme time	Interview	Learning report	Coding
1	Vice chairman	Student affairs	U.S.	2013	Yes	Yes	VC-3
2	Vice chairman	Student affairs	U.K.	2016	Yes	Yes	VC-2
3	Vice chairman	Student affairs	Canada	2017	Yes	Yes	VC-4

Note The role refers to the role held at the time of interviewing

follows: VC-3 attended a U.S. leadership development programme on the theme of a *student-centred teaching service system* in 2013. The programme was organised by the CEAIE and included 22 participants. VC-3 had served as vice chairman for two years prior to the leadership development. The second participant, VC-2, attended a U.K. leadership development programme in 2016 on the theme of university research and *education for innovation and entrepreneurship.* The programme was organised by the NAEA and included 23 participants. He had served as vice chairman for more than one year prior to the leadership development. Finally, VC-4, attended a leadership development programme in Canada in 2017, on the theme of *Pedagogy in HEI and student development*. The programme was organised by the NAEA and included 22 participants. He had been vice chairman for two years prior to the leadership development.

3.2   Data Collection

The data for this chapter included three interviews, four learning reports and follow-up news collected from the websites of the participants' HEIs. All the data were originally in Chinese. Between April and June 2018, the team members of the research project conducted interviews with the three participants at their respective HEIs.

The participants also shared their reflective learning reports with the research team. These learning reports were required as homework by the organisers. In addition, VC-2 shared another, simplified, learning report with the research team. Based on the interviews, the research team searched for follow-up news from the participants' HEI websites. These data served different purposes in verifying or supplementing each other, which was considered the richness of the chapter. All the participants accepted the research invitations, arranged for sufficient time and gave their full support to the interviews. Each interview lasted for 40 to 60 min.

3.3   Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in Chinese as the author is a native Chinese speaker and the raw data was in Chinese. Qualitative content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) was used for the analysis of the data. The author not only analysed the texts of the data, but also paid attention to the HEI leaders' indigenous meaning-making around leadership and their learnings in the overseas leadership development programmes. As a Shaanxi local, the author was easily able to understand some slang spoken by the interviewees.

Overall, the following steps were applied to the qualitative data collected: First, the author examined the three HEI leaders' overseas leadership development experiences and highlighted particular situations they had experienced as leaders. Second, the author connected with the Chinese HE context when pondering the participants'

knowledge of the Chinese HE system, such as the challenges of polarisation and the marketisation of HE, and the comparison between Chinese and Western HE systems. Third, considering the three participants' career trajectories and their changing beliefs following the overseas leadership development programmes, the author explored significant shifts in thought that they experienced in relation to how their ideal HEI should be.

The analysis was not purely inductive since the author was familiar with and influenced by some key studies and theories prior to the analysis. The theoretical perspective of transformative learning and the concept of 'the third space' were then applied to interpret the data. This involved some expanding and collapsing of themes and further refinement of the descriptors.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

In addition to the operational methods, ethics is an important concern in educational research. Cohen et al. (2011) point out that ethical issues are present during all steps of a research project, and they include the nature of the project itself, the context of the research, the procedures adopted, the data collection methods, the nature of the participants, the types of data collected, what is done with the data and how it is disseminated. Thus, throughout the research process, ethical issues were carefully taken into consideration. First, the study gained the approval of the National Office for Educational Sciences Planning, China (NOESP). All the participating HEI leaders took part in the study voluntarily. They were informed of their right to refuse to join in or to freely withdraw from the study. The interviews took place in a natural environment, and the HEI leaders were briefed beforehand. Interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recorder. The recordings were stored electronically on a password-protected computer. The names of the participants were allocated anonymously. All these endeavours aimed to reveal the participants' opinions on the overseas leadership development programmes authentically and reliably.

4 Findings

Following their eye-opening journeys to the West, the three research participants described their experiences of more than one month of leadership development. The overseas leadership development programme, as a critical incident, broke all their preconceptions and changed their approaches to their work in the HEIs. In this section, the theoretical perspective of transformative learning is used to reflect on the effect of the overseas leadership development experiences on the HEI leaders' leadership. Here, instead of clarifying objectively what leadership is, a subjective interpretation of how the participants identified themselves is manifested as the findings. Furthermore, as the author, I interpret changes in the participants' leadership in

terms of the third space. Thus, I use the roles and experiences of the HEI leaders to represent the transformative process and the outcomes of their learning, both during and after their overseas leadership development programmes.

4.1   From a Leader to a Service Provider

VC-3 visited the eastern part of the U.S. in March 2013. In his learning report, the topic he wrote about was 'building a student-centred teaching service system'. The term 'service' became a keyword in VC-3's transformative learning experience during the overseas leadership development programme. VC-3 described his visit as follows:

> I was appointed to chair the student affairs by HEI A in 2011. Two years later, I had a chance to participate in this overseas leadership development programme. It was an enjoyable experience overall....... We visited a lot of places in the eastern part of the U.S., including George Mason University, etc. (VC-3, interview)

VC-3 regarded the overseas leadership development programme as a bridge that connected with his prior working experience. It seemed that his visit to the U.S. gave him a new perspective on his previous work. When being interviewed about his achievements, he said,

> The timing of this programme was perfect for me. I had administrated the students' affairs at my HEI for two years. I was seeking an opportunity to learn something new and incorporate that into my practice. The major achievement [for me] persists in the idea of student-centred learning in the HEI. The former Minister of Education [in China] said that HEIs serve two groups, i.e., the teachers and students. I especially focus on the subjective experience of students in the HEI. Seeing students as involved in the foundations of the HEI is important. Students should be encouraged to engage in HEI governance and management. I used to think that the teacher-student relationship in the university was merely based on transactions. Students pay, and we provide a service. But I changed my views after the programme: we should regard students as the owners of the HEI. One trainer told us that students are potential investors after graduation. They would endorse the HEI in the future. We use jargon in speaking of 'student management'. Should the students be managed? This idea is totally wrong. Although, in China, we respect the absolute authority of the teachers, students share equal status with the teachers in modern times. (VC-3, interview)

His overseas visit to the U.S. HEIs changed VC-3's ideas regarding teacher-student relationships in the HEI. From the perspective of an HEI leader, VC-3 considered the unsustainability of HEI financial support that came merely from the government. 'Students as potential investors' is a metaphor that describes a novel connectedness between adult teachers and young students. VC-3 looked not only at the uni-direction of teaching students, but also formed an interactive relationship between the HEI and the students. This future-oriented perspective gave VC-3 a new stance in supporting a student-centred service. Not only did VC-3 transform his views and ideas on HEI, but he also enacted some reforms at his HEI. In VC-3's report, he wrote:

> The institution and its methods should be constructed systematically. The students' assessment policy was reformed with more emphasis on their learning. Not only the academic learning, but also their service learning as the second class [extracurricular activities]. Tutoring is also a policy by which students communicate with their teachers at least once every semester. We set a reward system for tutors who sacrifice their time to mentor their students. (VC-3, learning report)

The visit and his observations enabled VC-3 to identify the deficiencies of his HEI under the Chinese HE system. He might not have reflected critically on student affairs if he had not participated in the overseas leadership development programme. VC-3 said,

> The wireless internet has not covered the whole campus. And, the reconstruction of students' accommodation, such as air-conditioners, is not good. We should put our students in our hearts. (VC-3, interview)

In terms of how to change situations in his HEI, VC-3 believed that it involves something that is 'unconsciously influenced':

> We can write the phrase 'student-centred' into HEI regulations, but nobody would realise it. It would be useless. So, the problem is with people's epistemic views. It is something that unconsciously influences the HEI. (VC-3, interview)

VC-3's visit to the U.S. HEIs transformed his perspectives on HEI governance. Students as the subjects of HEI need systems that are more supportive in enabling them to become autonomous persons. VC-3, in his interviews, repeated the word 'autonomy', which is another key factor in HEI reform and student development. This intercultural learning opportunity helped him to reflect on the weaknesses of his HEI and the orientation needed for future endeavours.

4.2   From a Practitioner to a Reflective Thinker

VC-2 visited the U.K. in September 2016. VC-2 talked most about innovative education and education for entrepreneurship in his report. Prior to the leadership development, he considered himself a practitioner who had little theoretical understanding of HE. However, the U.K. leadership development programme provided him with an opportunity to reflect on his routine work. He recognised that the specific operation was less important than the 'condition of people'. VC-2 said in the interview,

> In fact, from the point of view of the HEI, it is of critical importance that teachers have enthusiasm for education, students and their work. However, our teachers are more interested in their scientific research [instead of educating students], because publication is related to their titles and promotions. So how to truly embody the love for education, love for students, devote themselves to teaching and cultivate talents? (VC-2, interview)

VC-2's questioning originated from his observations on the HEI campuses in the U.K. He noticed that at the University of London, both college students and faculty members embraced a 'sunny optimism'. The living conditions in British HEIs

highlighted huge differences in comparison with those in Chinese HEIs. Coming from a background of accountability and 'publish-or-perish', VC-2 transformed his understanding of the aims of the HEI as they relate to student development:

> It is the most important thing to cultivate talents. Cultivating talents does not only mean that you teach this course well, but you also need to do it with your heart. Then you are a leader, a teacher and a model for students through your speech, behaviour and thought. (VC-2, interview)

In terms of how to cultivate young students, VC-2 continued:

> I looked forward to this visit since I knew that from the first industrial revolution to the second, and then to the third, the U.K. has always been the pioneer. I think the height of a nation is determined by its reading level. An HEI campus without reading has no real education. A city full of books is the people's spiritual home. In fact, I think the most important thing is to cultivate students' ability to read and to learn. But now, our students sometimes do not read, even some of our teachers do not read. I think it's incredible. (VC-2, interview)

The opportunity of an overseas visit gave VC-2 a critical perspective on the Chinese HE system and on the micro-practice of his own HEI. In his narrative, VC-2 repeated the 'culture' of the HEI, and he saw the transforming of the HEI culture to be his current goal:

> It is an issue of culture. It's that inner thing of [HEI] itself. I feel deeply there, i.e., the lowest level of leadership is management by person. The second level is management by rules, and the third [highest] level is culture reconstruction. I consider that my HEI is now operating at the second level, i.e. in its evaluating of colleges and faculties. The evaluation system is perfect, but you cannot see much of it in the British HEIs. (VC-2, interview and learning report)

VC-2's interpretation of executive leadership is very interesting. He divides HEI leadership into three levels from the lowest to the highest:

> When you go to their [British] campus, you will feel the culture [of the HEI]. Many things seem to be formed naturally. Students love learning, and teachers like teaching. A teacher has that kind of noble personality, who not only teaches but also educates people. Culture cannot be seen or touched but is very important. It is just like the air, you cannot see or touch it, but you need it and cannot do without it. I think it is very important to construct an advanced campus culture in the HEI. Once a culture is formed, it will be amazing. (VC-2, interview)

After the overseas leadership development programme, VC-2 tried to organise more activities for students to enable them to understand the HEI culture. I found from his university's website news that he proposed the 'scholarly campus' and used the metaphor of the 'fragrance of books' to describe his expectations for students to be reading. Meanwhile, he considered sports meetings, entrepreneurship competitions and accommodation systems to be rituals through which HEIs would cultivate young people. Through his overseas leadership development, VC-2 developed his personal understanding and new practices of HE administration. The visit to the U.K. created a third space in which VC-2 could look back and then look forward to visualise a trajectory for development in his Chinese HEI.

4.3   From a Learner to a Communicative-Creator

VC-4 visited Canada in November 2017. As his first time to go abroad, he considered the experience 'an eye-opening journey'. Prior to the leadership development, VC-4 viewed himself as a learner who would gain advanced educational experiences from the Western countries he visited. However, his intrinsic observations did not result in his comparing the differences between China and Canada. VC-4 noted,

> There is no big disparity between China and Canada. China has made extensive reforms during the past decades. The city infrastructure in Toronto, for example, is no better than that in Xi'an. (VC-4, interview and learning report)

VC-4's account revealed a perspective on intercultural competence: hybridized and simultaneous diversity is vital for HEI leaders when they communicate with cultural others. Nevertheless, VC-4 admitted that the HE system in Canada was more advanced than that in China.

> Although most HEIs in Canada are public, they have higher autonomy than their Chinese counterparts. In Canada, the government gives financial support to universities but has little control......The Chinese HEIs nowadays pursue comprehensive education. However, each HEI should have its own ideas and characteristics. (VC-4, interview and learning report)

VC-4's observations at the University of British Columbia indicated his awareness of 'real internationalisation in HE'. VC-4 continued,

> Canadian HEIs emphasize internationalisation and have a strong sense of crisis. One challenge is how to enrol more students. Canadian HEIs pay more attention to enrolling international students. This creates for us the implication that we, Chinese HEI leaders, should expand our international exchanges and improve our internationalisation level. (VC-4, interview)

VC-4 connected his reflections with HE education reform in China. In his learning report, VC-4 wrote that Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run HEIs are a new trend in China. However, the foundation of cooperation is at the level of reciprocal learning, which is related to a synchronised position of intercultural competence. VC-4 acknowledged that:

> Changing the mindset is the most important [task] for HEIs in the central and western China. We should re-think: what to learn and how to learn from the Western countries? Meanwhile, we should not forget the Chinese national [political] situation, like our social regime. Intercultural learning needs institutional change, and the government needs to do this. (VC-4, interview)

VC-4 did not think that the Canadian HEI management was much different from that in China. He noticed that in Canada and North America, ideological education is much the same as in China. VC-4's transformative learning emerged in this overseas leadership development programme as he moved from a negative learner to a communicative-creator.

VC-4's case prompts a very interesting discussion about how intercultural learning empowers learners' cultural confidence. Most studies place China as a developing

country, where culture, ideas and technologies are largely inputted from the West. However, with the increasing development of the Chinese economy and democratic politics, national confidence is necessary if it is to achieve 'the two-hundred years mission of the Chinese dream', according to VC-4's words. Thus, HEI leaders should work as cultural communicators by introducing experiences of Chinese HE to foreign HEIs.

5 Discussion and Conclusions

Having transitioned the field texts into research texts, it is now possible to highlight the all-encompassing implications that are woven throughout the participants' accounts, as we have now crafted them. Produced through a process of narrating overseas leadership development experiences, the discussion that emerged provides insights into what occurred on the trips abroad and how they helped Chinese HEI leaders to transform their perceptions of leadership.

From the three HEI leaders' narrative accounts, it is evident that their overseas experiences in Western countries renewed their understanding of running an HEI. The five phases of transformative learning, as conceptualised by Nohl (2015), could all be identified in the data. For example, VC-3 acknowledged that the central concept of the HEI should be student-centred. In an era of internationalisation, it is necessary to borrow advanced ideas to reconstruct the Chinese HEIs. Similarly, VC-2 was aware that the HEI culture is the most important and inherent quality of the HEI operation. He went on to propose detailed practices, such as organising reading clubs and appraising teachers' scholarship as expressed in their teaching. An interesting finding showed how VC-4, in his first experience of going abroad, dismantled his preconceptions of the developed countries. He realised that China had also been developing and had achieved almost the same infrastructure as the Canadians, which led him to have higher expectations for the Chinese HEIs. VC-4 considered autonomy to be of significance for HEI faculties. All these three vice chairmen experienced transformative learning during and after their overseas leadership development programmes, which implies that a transformative dimension should be a new consideration in the leadership development of HEI leaders. Their new ways of thinking about their work, their transformational roles as executives and their possible intentions to reform existing policies in their own HEIs are all evidence of the learning outcomes and the development of their leadership. Resonating with Watkins et al.'s (2011) study, future evaluation and reflections on HEI leaders' leadership development programmes could focus on participants' changes of perception, attitude and vision for their work.

The chapter shows how the three Chinese HEI vice chairmen transformed their understanding of HE after just one experience of participating in an overseas leadership development programme. It is firstly aligned with Crevani's (2018) argumentation that leadership is a fluid state which is an ongoing development. Meanwhile,

in this chapter, the intercultural setting is a vital factor and facilitator in the transformation of HEI leaders' leadership. In the present chapter, I describe the intercultural setting as a 'third space', a space of in-betweenness, a border zone, neither here nor there, a space whose 'most salient features are instability and lack of clarity about where one belongs and what one should be doing' (Barad, 2007; Barlow, 2007, p. 244). It is showed in the three cases that their development of leadership and transformation of roles and identities towards cultural hybridity was infused with traces of reflection, reflexivity, and dialogicality. The East–West-HE-Third-Spaces are full of ambivalence and contradiction and provide opportunities for initiating 'new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation' (Bhabha, 2004, pp. 1–2) in the future of the Chinese HEI leaders' professional work.

As described in the present chapter, the overseas leadership development programmes for HEI leaders are creating this third space. In other words, the attending executives' contrasting and conflicting cultural experiences combine to create a hybrid transformative space, from which new understandings can emerge that are not bound by any one group's cultural discourse. For example, in this chapter, the three vice chairmen's reflections on their own HEI administration made possible the development of their leadership through role-reformation. The third spaces of this chapter were the in-between spaces that 'provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation' (Bhabha, 2004, pp. 1–2). Third spaces are also cultural and collective spaces, within which individual HEI leaders can make sense of discourses on teaching and learning in the HEI and of the administrative systems that prevail in the other spaces they inhabit. The transformative learning process of these three HEI leaders arose spontaneously from the third space and from the people they met within it. The third spaces in the present chapter could be observed and interpreted as spaces between the past and the future, the East and the West and between the various roles held as both educator and learner. The outcomes furthermore confirm that the official overseas leadership development programmes for Chinese HEI leaders made positive contributions to the participants within those spaces: geographically, socio-culturally, interpersonally, and relationally (Cox & Hassard, 2018).

In the globalised world today, the internationalisation of HE has permeated individuals' thinking and behaviours. The official policies for HEI faculties, including their leaders and international exchanges, create opportunities for developing countries such as mainland China. The narrative and interpretation of the three Chinese HEI vice-chairmen's experiences reveal the validity of the overseas leadership development programmes and imply the possible transformation of HE systems both inside and outside of an HEI. The successful experiences reflected in this chapter could be transferred to other countries and contexts with cautious attention and localised adaptation.

To summarise, this chapter, as seen from the emic stance of the participants, highlights a transformative learning process resulting from overseas leadership development programmes. Acknowledging the dynamic interaction between hybrid cultural forces, the overseas leadership development programmes created possibilities for the Chinese HEI leaders to transform their perceptions and practices relating to their HEI

work. The significant contribution of this chapter is its confirmation of the value of the overseas leadership development programme. The chapter has implications for other countries that would develop their HEI leaders' leadership through cross-national exchange. First, long-term cross-national exchange programmes will have positive impacts on the leadership of HEI leaders. Second, the participants' reflections and inquiry could enhance their learning outcomes and the transformation of their leadership. In terms of the limitations of the chapter, more studies involving longitudinal investigation are critically needed to examine the programmes' effectiveness, both for the individual executives and for systemic changes in HE.

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Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Overseas Leadership Development Programmes

Meng Tian and **Xin Xing**

Abstract In this final chapter of the book, we summarised four key lessons learned from the 2012–2018 overseas leadership development programmes, including needs analysis-based programme design, centralised programme organisation, immersive learning experience and evidence-informed programme impact. Drawing on our research evidence, we proposed three recommendations for future overseas leadership development programmes, which can be used by Chinese programme organisers, Chinese HEI leaders and overseas programme providers.

Keywords Programme impact · Key lesson · Recommendation · Programme organiser · Chinese HEI leaders · Programme provider

1 Introduction

Providing overseas leadership development programmes to HEI leaders in central and western regions of China serves the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Under this overarching goal, Target 4.b underlines the importance of providing scholarship to and developing higher education in developing countries. Following that, Target 4.c emphasises the strategy of training teachers in developing countries through international cooperation (United Nations, 2015). Developing HEI leaders' leadership capacity so that they become key change agents in their institutions is in alignment with these targets set by the United Nations.

Organising overseas leadership development programmes for Chinese HEI leaders also sits as top priority on the Chinese government's agenda. In a knowledge-intensive society, higher education plays a critical role in redistributing knowledge-power and adding value to human capital through education and skills training. If the central

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and western regions of China aim to keep their most talented students, they need to provide high-quality higher education, an enjoyable learning experience, and a prosperous local job market.

International benchmarking is one strategy that enables Chinese HEI leaders to learn from the world's best universities as well as to compare their own practices with those in similar types of universities in other countries. According to our research findings, attending overseas leadership development programmes has enabled HEI leaders to acquire an immersive learning experience and to conduct international benchmarking.

In today's globalised world, an important indicator for the development of higher education is the degree of internationalisation. In most HEIs, internationalisation is manifested in the number of international students, staff, joint teaching programmes and transnational research projects. As a result of internationalisation, many HEIs have created resources and opportunities for student and staff international mobility. Echoing this, attending overseas leadership development programmes has become more and more popular among HEI leaders. Notably, China is one of the few countries that has launched a national-level initiative to send HEI leaders from less affluent central and western regions abroad for professional development. This initiative is a milestone in China's higher education development. Valuable data has been collected, knowledge created and lessons learned along the way.

Stier (2004) synthesised three goals for higher education internationalisation. The liberal and educational goal prepares students for the global world, the instrumental goal serves the labour market and economic growth, and the idealistic transformative goal blends various cultures and transform societies (Stier, 2004, as cited in Liu, 2021). Through internationalisation, higher education institutions are serving the society, students, economy and a globalised world. In many western countries, neoliberalism has become the underpinning ideology for higher education internationalisation (Altbach, 2002; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Liu, 2021). Our study echoes Liu's (2021) findings that internationalisation is conceptualised by Chinese HEI leaders in a different way compared to the traditional western definition. The national development goal of enhancing China's global competitiveness is guiding the HEI internationalisation practices. Exporting Chinese higher education discourses and stories to the international community (e.g., via Confucius Institutes, staff and student exchange) is as important as importing western best practices and policies.

In the previous chapters, the authors have closely examined the effectiveness and impact of these overseas leadership development programmes delivered between 2012 and 2018. In this chapter, we will draw on the evidence and synthesise key lessons in relation to the programme design, organisation, delivery and impact. Based on the reviewed evidence, we will propose recommendations for future development.

2   Lessons Learned

2.1   *Needs Analysis-Based Programme Design*

The pre-leadership development survey revealed that the overseas leadership development programme participants mainly consisted of top-level HEI leaders, such as chairmen, vice-chairmen, presidents and vice-presidents, who hold the highest leadership positions in the HEIs. Nearly 85% of the participants were male. The gender imbalance was not caused by the overseas leadership development programme candidate selection but rather by the gender gap in the overall population of HEI leaders in China. Female leaders are significantly underrepresented in the entire higher education system, especially at the top level. For all the HEI leaders, the age limit was set at 50 years old or below. Top-level HEI leaders under 50 years old are deemed the most important change agents who promote institutional- and regional-level higher education development. They are also expected to disseminate learning experiences within the core leadership teams in their own HEIs.

The guiding principle for designing overseas leadership development programmes has been to creatively combine overseas best practices with Chinese values and the Communist Party educational goals. One priority has been on developing Chinese HEIs that provide academic qualifications. In comparison, only 5.8% of the HEI leaders from institutions that offer vocational qualifications were selected for the 2012–2018 programmes.

The needs analysis revealed that most Chinese HEI leaders wanted to have a more nuanced understanding of overseas HEI governance, including quality assurance, university-industry collaboration, innovation and entrepreneurship and HEIs' roles in developing the local economy. In contrast, less importance was assigned to benchmark infrastructure and the physical environment of the overseas HEIs. In other words, Chinese HEI leaders wanted to learn more about the 'software' driving the universities not just the 'hardware' in which all the activities took place. It was a shared understanding that the overseas leadership development programmes should be designed to serve Chinese HEIs' short-term and long-term development goals and the HEI leaders' professionalisation.

On the individual level, the Chinese HEI leaders expressed a great need for the development of their leadership capacities in the areas of promoting internationalisation, leading educational changes and innovation and enhancing teaching and research competences within their HEIs. On the institutional level, a majority of the HEI leaders wanted to attend overseas leadership development programmes delivered in English-speaking countries, such as the U.S., Australia, the U.K. and Canada, suggesting the dominance of Anglo-Saxon cultures and the export of their higher education. At the same time, the Chinese HEI leaders widely acknowledged that their HEIs had to follow socialist values and the Communist Party's educational development goals. Overseas programme providers were expected to respect these needs and fundamental principles when designing their programmes. There was a consensus between the overseas programme providers, Chinese organisers, and Chinese HEI

leaders that overseas leadership development was not a one-way knowledge transfer. The purpose of these programmes was not to provide a blueprint but a mirror. When designing the programme content, the overseas programme providers were expected to decolonise learning content, respect the Chinese socialist values and had a basic understanding of China's educational development goals.

2.2 Centralised Programme Organisation

The second lesson learned involves the need for a centralised professional programme organisation to coordinate participant selection, programme content design, needs analysis, communication, logistics and other miscellaneous tasks.

From 2012 to 2018, all 66 overseas leadership development programmes were co-organised by the NAEA and the CEAIE. Both institutions are affiliated with the MoE and have different missions. The core mission of the NAEA is to provide in-service and continuing professional development programmes for educational leaders in China. The core mission of the CEAIE is to conduct non-governmental foreign education cooperation and exchange. The NAEA was the lead organiser, and this was evident from the different number of overseas leadership development programmes organised by the two institutions. Among the 66 overseas leadership development programmes, 53 were organised by the NAEA and 13 by the CEAIE.

Regarding the institutional profiles, each overseas leadership development programme consisted of participants from 12 to 22 HEIs located in several different provinces in China. The diversity of the HEI leaders and the HEIs they led greatly enriched the programmes. On the one hand, it provided opportunities for the HEI leaders to network with each other. On the other hand, it was challenging for programme organisers and providers to meet participants' diverse personal and institutional needs. For instance, each overseas leadership development programme may contain participants from HEIs with a variety of specialisations, such as engineering, fine arts, medicine and agriculture. Our findings show that more targeted leadership development is needed in the future by matching the HEI leaders' profiles with the overseas HEIs' profiles.

Each overseas leadership development programme lasted 31 days. The overseas leadership development programmes consisted of three phrases: the pre-leadership development phase (seven days) in China, the overseas residential leadership development phase (21 days) and the post-leadership development phase (three days) in China. The typical leadership development procedure was as follows. The HEI leaders first attended the pre-leadership development at the NAEA; then, they attended residential leadership development programmes abroad and finally returned to the NAEA to present their learning outcomes. Notably, the post-leadership development phase included both thematic and general sessions. In the thematic session, the HEI leaders from various groups shared their learning experiences in different

countries. In the general session, representatives from all overseas leadership development programmes presented key learning outcomes to the entire group of participants. The HEI leaders found this arrangement beneficial because they were able to exchange information and experiences within and across different overseas leadership development programmes. The 31-day leadership development enabled the Chinese HEI leaders to acquire in-depth immersive learning experiences, but the entire programme was not too long to infer with their administrative leadership work.

2.3   Immersive Learning Experience

From 2012 to 2018, over 130 overseas HEIs and organisations from eight countries were involved in delivering the overseas leadership development programmes to Chinese HEI leaders. The large number and wide variety of programme providers made it possible for the Chinese HEI leaders to observe and compare different higher education practices.

In each country, there were two to three lead programme providers coordinating the overseas leadership development programmes. The presence of a central coordination was helpful because in such cases, the host countries were able to answer queries and arrange local receptions more effectively. Most lead programme providers were internationally renowned universities. Their rich resources, sound reputation and extensive networks with other HEIs, industries and local communities made them popular destinations for international benchmarking. Most of the Chinese HEI leaders appreciated the immersive learning experience in these prestigious HEIs. Additionally, the Chinese HEI leaders underlined the value of visiting overseas HEIs that shared similar profiles with their own institutions. By visiting these overseas HEIs, they learned about concrete higher education governance strategies, such as vision setting, collaboration with local industries and the attraction of high-quality teachers and students.

The most commonly used programme delivery method was lecturing. Other approaches, including campus and lab visits, lesson observations, meetings with educational administrators and government officials, thematic workshops and online tutorials, were used by different programme providers. During the 21-day residential leadership development, the HEI leaders visited at least two to three cities in each country. Social and cultural events were seen as an indispensable part of the leadership development as they enabled the Chinese HEI leaders to closely observe and experience the economic, cultural and social life in the host countries.

According to our research findings, most Chinese HEI leaders were at least basic English language users. There was no obligatory English language test during the participant selection process. It was necessary for the programme organisers to arrange for interpreters to assist the overseas leadership development programmes. Ideally, in addition to their language competences, the English-Chinese interpreters should have sufficient knowledge of higher education systems in the host countries

so that nuanced professional knowledge and bilateral dialogues would not be lost in translation.

2.4 Impact of the Overseas Leadership Development Programme

To objectively assess the impact of the overseas leadership development programmes, the research team conducted a third-party impact study from 2017 to 2022. Research findings were reported in both Chinese and English scientific publications. This book, published by Springer, is one key research output. The research team members are based in universities or research institutions independent from those of the programme organisers and providers. Data used for the impact study included the pre-leadership development survey data, leadership development programme documents, HEI leaders' learning reports and publications, post-leadership development interviews as well as follow-up news from the leaders' HEI websites.

The NAEA shared their post-leadership development satisfaction survey data with the research team. This survey mainly assessed participants' levels of satisfaction in the areas of accommodation, transportation, interpretation service and hospitality in the host countries. A vast majority of participants were satisfied or very satisfied with the services they had received during the overseas residential leadership development. Some participants expected overseas programme providers to arrange accommodations that were close to the leadership development venues.

In addition to the satisfaction survey data, the research team conducted interviews with the Chinese HEI leaders. These interviews focused on the impact of the leadership development on HEI leaders' professional development and institutional-level changes. Findings have shown that it took years to design and implement institutional-level changes. One key to success was the presence of a critical mass of change agents within the HEI to drive the change process forward. This required the HEI leaders to actively disseminate overseas learning experiences and their agendas for change with other leaders after their overseas leadership development. Evidence also showed that if the HEI leaders had clear goals when attending the leadership development and were kept in the same leadership positions for a number of years after the leadership development, they were more likely to initiate and implement institutional-level changes as the result of overseas leadership development programmes. Top-level leaders, such as chairmen and presidents, were key change agents and had the best access to resources and networks that enabled them to experiment with new ideas and practices.

All the Chinese HEI leaders confirmed gaining professional development through the overseas leadership development programmes. They were able to critically reflect on the practices observed in the overseas HEIs and analyse the different contextual factors that shaped educational governance and leadership practices in the

Chinese HEIs. The interviewees repeatedly highlighted the importance of transmitting Chinese success stories concerning the development of higher education and showing great confidence in leading higher education development in the central and western regions.

3 Recommendations

Looking to the future, the Chinese HEI leaders and the entire research team hope that overseas leadership development programme can be further developed to benefit more HEI leaders in the central and western regions of China. Based on our findings, several recommendations can be proposed to the programme organisers, participants and providers.

3.1 Recommendations for Programme Organisers

First, the programme organisers are expected to design bespoke leadership development themes. These themes should be specific and aim at responding to the challenges and reforms of HEIs in China. They should also meet the needs of the institution and HEI leaders' professional development. Indeed, western higher education institutions take pride in their best practices, values and cultures being benchmarked by international visitors. For Chinese programme organisers, they bear a dual mission of introducing overseas higher education practices and consolidating national identity. This implies a clear differentiation between internationalisation and westernisation in higher education (Mok, 2007; Yang, 2002).

Second, the programme organisers can put leaders from the same type of HEI in the same group. This is because they share similar contexts, challenges and leadership development needs. This also enables the organisers to match Chinese HEIs with their overseas programme providers. Local governments in central and western regions are advised to provide continued support and resources to facilitate collaboration between these Chinese HEIs and their overseas counterparts. For example, developing student and staff exchange programmes can greatly increase Chinese HEIs' attractiveness and strengthen their international profiles. In addition, a deliberate choice of similarly benchmarked institutions will improve the quality of overseas leadership development programmes and provide a sound foundation for future cooperation between Chinese and overseas HEIs.

Third, the selection and grouping of Chinese HEI leaders can be optimised. For example, the participants' age limit can be raised from 50 to 55 years old to include more top-level leaders, such as chairmen and presidents. Our findings showed that only 23.2% of the participants were chairmen and presidents. Some chairmen and presidents were not eligible for the overseas leadership development programme due to their age. However, Chinese HEI leaders' retirement age is 60 years old. This

means if they attend overseas leadership development programmes at the age of 55, they will still have a five-year term to initiate, implement and institutionalise positive changes in their HEIs. Another suggestion we propose is grouping HEI leaders according to their leadership responsibilities. Normally, in a Chinese HEI, there are two to five vice chairmen, four to seven vice presidents and one secretary of commission for discipline inspection. These top-level leaders have different responsibilities, including teaching, research, financial management, human resource management, student management and discipline inspection. Thus, they all have different professional development needs. Matching their leadership development needs with particular overseas leadership development programme themes is essential for their professional and institutional development.

Finally, programme content can be designed in a more systematic and coherent way. The findings showed that some programme content appeared fragmented and repetitive. In some cases, there were too many overseas programme providers delivering one overseas leadership development programme, which led to a lack of coherence and coordination. It is advisable to have more focused and in-depth leadership development provided by one to two lead overseas HEIs per theme.

The Chinese HEI leaders who attended overseas leadership development programmes from 2012 and 2018 found the overall length of the programme appropriate. Nonetheless, some thought that there was too little time for reflection. According to the programme, there were three days for the post-leadership development reflection and summary. In reality, the first day was spent on travelling, resting and recovering from jetlag. The second day was dedicated to the reflection session, and on the third day, the participants finished the leadership development and left the NAEA. The participants considered the schedule to be too tight.

During the interview, the HEI leaders proposed two solutions for restructuring the programme and optimising the timetable. First, they suggested shortening the length of the pre-leadership development phase from seven to five days and extending the post-leadership development phase from three to five days. The second solution entails shortening the overseas leadership development phase from 21 to 14 days and prolonging the post-leasership development phase from three to seven days.

3.2 Recommendations for Programme Participants

Most Chinese HEI leaders found it necessary to have reflection seminars both during and after the overseas leadership development. During the leadership development, the leaders emphasised the importance of reflection-in-action. For example, after the participants complete leadership development in each overseas HEI, a reflection session can be organised to capture key learning outcomes. The programme can include self-study and weekly reflections in the timetable. In addition to having the reflection seminar immediately after the completion of the leadership development, the provision of ample time to compile learning outcomes, implement new ideas, identify challenges and draw suggestions for future programmes is recommended.

Our findings showed that the Chinese HEI leaders appreciated the follow-up seminars organised by the NAEA in which they had fruitful discussions and reflections on the overseas leadership development programmes. In addition to the reflection seminars hosted by the organisers, some HEI leaders initiated self-organised follow-up seminars to share their learning outcomes and experiences. This suggests that the overseas leadership development programmes have long-lasting impact on boosting Chinese HEI leaders' intrinsic motivation for learning and development.

Furthermore, the participants highlighted the importance of pre-leadership development preparation, including setting learning goals, preparing for questions, designing programme-related tasks and familiarising themselves with foreign culture and higher education systems. During the leadership development, it is essential for the HEI leaders to devote themselves earnestly to the programme and avoid being distracted by work or other tasks. HEI leaders are advised to observe overseas best practices through a critical lens. When translating learned lessons into local practice, it is recommended that the HEI leaders will effectively engage other HEI leaders and teachers in the design and implementation of the change. This implies that those top level HEI leaders should design and train leadership teams consisting of both top and middle level leaders in order to consolidate knowledge within the institution. Kicking off and sustaining institutional level changes require a critical mass of change agents to support each other and to act as critical friends throughout the process.

3.3   Recommendations for Programme Providers

Knowledge decolonisation has become a priority in many Western higher education systems. When designing and providing short-term professional leadership development to Chinese HEI leaders, overseas programme providers are advised to treat Chinese HEI leaders as knowledge co-creators throughout the process. This can be achieved in the following ways.

First, programme providers should work closely with the programme organisers in China to co-design pre-leadership development needs analysis surveys. Participants' professional and institutional development needs should be determined as well as their action plans after the leadership development. These questions will effectively guide HEI leaders to set concrete leadership development goals and encourage them to use action-oriented learning approaches. The use of the pre-leadership development phase to equip HEI leaders with knowledge about the overseas higher education system and host country's economic, social and cultural development can help the participants quickly adapt to the leadership development environment.

Second, evidence has shown that the presence of a central coordination office can positively facilitate bilateral communication and enhance Chinese HEI leaders' overseas experiences. Booking accommodations close to the leadership development venue would be appreciated by the participants, especially when they experience jetlag during the first few days. It is also essential to arrange a few social and cultural events during the overseas residential leadership development. Events that showcase

how overseas HEIs contribute to the local community and economic development are well received by the Chinese participants.

Third, in addition to the traditional leadership development methods, such as lectures and seminars, we recommend overseas programme providers to use more learner-centred approaches, such as one-to-one action research tutorials, job shadowing, teaching observation and campus/lab visits. It is important to acknowledge Chinese HEI leaders' expertise and use them as resources during the leadership development.

Fourth, as highlighted above, matching Chinese HEI leaders' leadership development needs with overseas programme providers' expertise is vital. Chinese HEI leaders who come from specialised institutions, such as HEIs in music, fine arts, tourism and agriculture, expect to visit overseas HEIs that share similar profiles. Many participants found the specialised leadership development more helpful than the general leadership development sessions.

4   Conclusion

In this chapter, we synthesised the key lessons learned from the 2012–2018 overseas leadership development programmes and proposed recommendations for the programme organisers, participants and providers. As the result of the Open-Door policy initiated in 1978, China is facing challenges of unequal development between the affluent eastern and under-resourced central and western regions (Yang, 2004). During the past decades, China has invested a great deal in developing higher education in the central and western regions. This endeavour is a response to the rapid economic, ecological and social changes in China. HEI leaders are deemed valuable human resources and change agents who drive local education and economic development (Niu et al., 2010). Providing more opportunities for Chinese HEI leaders from less affluent regions to acquire cutting-edge knowledge and broaden their horizons through overseas leadership development is undoubtedly an effective educational policy.

According to our study, the Chinese HEI leaders who attended the 2012–2018 overseas leadership development programmes have acquired a substantial amount of professional development and translated learned knowledge into practices over the years. Valuable networks with overseas HEIs in eight countries have been established. A huge amount of quantitative and qualitative data have been collected to inform the impact study reported in this book. All these resources should be used for the design and implementation of future leadership development events. It is our hope that this book provides education policymakers, administrators, researchers and practitioners with a multifaceted analysis of these overseas leadership development programmes.

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