

Performing under ‘the Baton of Administrative Power’? Chinese Academics’ Responses to Incentives for International Publications

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Abstract

Incentivizing international publications is a current topic of national debate in China and some other non-English speaking countries, echoing the discussion of managerialism in many other contexts. However, there is a shortage of research to conceptualize academics’ responses with empirical evidence. The study draws on 65 in-depth interviews with humanities and social sciences academics at six Chinese universities. It proposes two typologies to categorize academics’ affective responses (proactive, adaptive, resistant, hesitant, and detached) and behavioural responses (reconciling, rejecting, reforming, and rebelling). Building on the typologies, a framework was developed to explain the complicated relationship between incentives and publications. In addition, findings suggest that incentives imposed through administrative power could challenge academics’ agency. The study thereby proposes a reconsideration and construction of current incentive schemes, to move beyond managerialism and towards the integration of intrinsic academic values.

Keywords

Publication incentives; humanities and social sciences; international publications; managerialism; academics; China

1. Introduction

Publications in internationally-indexed journals are becoming increasingly important in global university rankings, national research assessment, and institutional evaluation on academics (Ammon 2001; Hazelkorn 2015; Hicks 2012). An increasing number of governments and universities around the world is promoting such publications with incentive schemes (Chou 2014; Franzoni et al. 2011; Shin 2007). Since the late 1980s, Chinese universities have been using publication incentives to encourage science and technology academics to publish in Science Citation Index (SCI) journals (Qin & Zhang 2008; Shao & Shen 2012). Past decades witnessed a rapid growth of such publications by Chinese scholars, with their global share rising from 0.3% in 1981 to 18.6% in 2016, now ranking first in the world (US National Science Foundation 1993, 2018). For most Chinese scientists in science and technology areas, SCI publications have become a ‘gold standard’ and a ‘yardstick’ in their research and careers (Hvistendahl 2013 p. 1036).

Comparatively, China has a smaller global share of Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) publications (Liu et al. 2015). Incentives for international publications in the humanities and social sciences (HSS) emerged two decades later, in the 2000s, but is widespread across Chinese universities (Xu et al. 2019). Until 2016, 84 out of the 116 ‘985’ and ‘211’ universities in China, namely top research universities enrolled in national ‘world-class university’ building ‘Project 985’ and ‘Project 211’ programmes, have set up university-level monetary and/or career-related incentive schemes (Xu et al. 2019). They often counted the number of SSCI and Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI) publications and offered them much larger financial bonuses and/or higher weight in research evaluation, tenure assessment, and career progression, as compared with most domestic publications (Xu et al. 2019).

Such publication incentives positioned academics into an accountable situation, echoing the discussion of managerialism (and related terms such as ‘New Public Management’

and ‘New Managerialism’) in other contexts (Deem 1998; Olssen & Peters 2007; Trow 1994). In many contemporary universities, managerialism has replaced collegiality, with the governance culture shifting from the professional consensus of leaders and academic communities to the autocratic control, a competitive work environment, and the increased accountability (Olssen 2002; Thornton 2009). Such a situation has positioned academics as ‘managed professionals’ (Blackmore 2003 p. 5), transferring power from academic autonomy to managerial prerogative, thus leading to lower morale and higher instrumentalism in academic work (Bryson 2004). Often, institutional emphasis on research productivity and performativity ‘militates against “blue skies” research, encourages dubious research tactics and strategies for maximising publications, citations and team-based research’ (Olssen, 2016, p. 135). Individuals’ agency is thereby limited under the managed research, with their horizons powerfully shaped by institutional strategies (Fanghanel 2012).

Chinese academics are no escape from the influence of managerialism (Linlin Li et al. 2013); however, their positions may be different from their western counterparts. Traditionally, Chinese scholars associate their academic pursuit of knowledge with social responsibility and national interests (Zha & Hayhoe 2018; Zha & Shen 2018). In particular, Chinese HSS academics are found to be in a ‘quandary created by the new managerial practices’, facing tensions between centralized academic system and individual autonomy, promoting national interests and negotiating with western-dominated knowledge system, and achieving international reputations and maintaining ideological correctness (Gao & Zheng 2018 p. 14).

In the context of incentivizing HSS international publications, potential impacts have been mostly discussed on the macro level. Some scholars believed publication incentives are beneficial to improving the visibility of Chinese HSS research (Liu Li 2009; Luan & Jiang 2008). The practice of incentivizing international publications also corresponded to the national ‘going-out’ policy of HSS, which advocated for the exportation and promotion of Chinese HSS

research, in replace of the previous one-way importing strategy (Ministry of Education 2011). In contrast, some scholars argued that HSS research is more embedded in cross-cultural, multi-lingual, and diversified ideological contexts than science and technology research; therefore, emphasising international publications may devalue Chinese-language research, result in self-colonisation, impair Chinese HSS academia's self-confidence, and replace domestic academic standards with western ones (Dang 2005; Deng 2010; Qin & Zhang 2008). Those concerns were shared by Chinese central government and President Xi Jinping, who encouraged Chinese HSS academics to remain guided by Marxism, preserve Chinese culture in international knowledge exchange, and avoid uncritical adaptation of Western ideologies (The Communist Party of China Central Committee 2004; Xi 2016).

Despite the widespread adoption of publication incentives and the consequent debates, Chinese academics' responses to publication incentives have not been examined to a large extent. To highlight the micro-level dynamics and address academics' importance as actors in policy implementation (Enders 2004; Trowler 1997), the study explores how HSS academics in China have responded to publication incentives. Drawing on interviews with 65 academics from six case study universities, it develops two typologies to categorize academics' affective and behavioural responses to publication incentives. Based on the discussion about incentives' influences, the paper also proposes implications for future policymaking.

2. A review of publication incentives and academics' responses

Incentives 'denote *ex-ante* measures aimed at influencing agents' value systems and/or the goal orientation of their actions, often prompting a change in their behaviour' (Oancea 2018 p. 1). For publication incentives, a study on 30 countries has identified three types of governmental incentives: funding-related incentives for institutions, career-related incentives for individuals, and cash incentives for individuals (Franzoni et al. 2011). In Chinese higher

education, publication incentive schemes were largely formulated on the institutional level, aiming at individual academics and including monetary and/or career-related incentives (Quan et al. 2017; Xu et al. 2019).

Studies in accounting, economics, management, and psychology have associated incentives with positive and negative influences (Deci 1971; Locke 1991; Prendergast 1999; Wright & Aboul-Ezz 1988). For instance, Bonner and Sprinkle's framework (2002) explained how monetary incentives could positively impact efforts and performance in accounting. In contrast, cognitive-evaluation theory suggested a decrease in performance caused by monetary incentives, as they may decrease intrinsic motivation due to the emphasis on external reward (Deci 1971; Deci & Ryan 1985). A meta-analysis of 39 studies on the relationship between financial incentives and performance also found the enhanced performance in quantity rather than in quality (Jenkins et al. 1998).

'Intrinsic motivation is a fragile flower, which may fade in the shadow of extrinsic incentives' (Frank 2004 p. 122). It is in debate whether extrinsic incentives, particularly monetary ones, are appropriate in research management. Scholars have pointed out potential conflicts between pecuniary incentives and inherent values of research (Jørgensen & Hanssen 2018; Kallio & Kallio 2012; Muller 2019). Morey (2003) noted that many rewards in academic life are of intrinsic value, and that 'academics consistently report that they are more motivated by intrinsic interests than by material ones' (p. 82).

Scholars' publication patterns could be influenced by external factors, such as by incentive schemes, performance-based funding systems, and evaluation requirements (e.g. Anderson & Tressler 2014; Butler 2003; Hammarfelt & De Rijcke 2015; Lillis & Curry 2010; Mathies et al. 2019). In Chinese academia, there is a growing body of literature to explore academics' publication choices under evaluative pressures, but they often examined a single case study institution and were not specifically addressing tensions rising from publication

incentives (Flowerdew & Li 2009; Ge 2015; Jiang et al. 2017). The current study extends a growing body of literature on the micro-level dynamics in research under managerialism. In particular, it contributes to the strand of research on academics under the influence of publication incentives, by conceptualising academics' responses with evidence from a more diversified group of participants across different institutions in China.

3. Methodology

The study draws on interviews with 65 HSS academics from three '985' and three '211' universities in China. '985' and '211' universities were designated under national '985' and '211' projects in the 1990s, with the aim to build world-class universities and improve the quality of Chinese higher education and research (China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Information 2009, 2012). Case universities were sampled based on their geographical location, characteristics of the university, features of their incentive documents, and SSCI and A&HCI publication numbers. Two universities are located in northern China (referred to as Uni-NA and Uni-NB), two in eastern China (Uni-EA and Uni-EB), one in central China (Uni-C), and one in western China (Uni-W). Three universities are more HSS-oriented, and three emphasize on science and technology areas. Four universities had initiated their incentive schemes for HSS international publications before 2010, and two started after 2010. By December 2017, two universities had more than 2000 SSCI and A&HCI publications, one had 1000-2000 such publications, and the other one had less than 1000. The annual number of such publications was growing at each university from 1990 to 2017.

Chinese HSS academic intervieweesⁱ were recruited through both 'purposive sampling' and 'snowball sampling' strategies (Merriam 1998 p. 63). The researcher first compiled a list of 30 potential interviewees by searching in the SSCI/A&HCI/Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) databases with the names of case universities, and found the top 5

academics with most publications and the top 5 academics with the highest citation times in each database. In case of overlapping, academics next on the list were selected. The second step was browsing academics' profiles on each HSS departments' websites, and selecting at least 30 additional academics with different job titles, from different disciplines, and with fewer publications than those in the first list. All potential interviewees from each case university were then sent email invitations. During interviews, the researcher also applied the snowball sampling method to recruit participants through the recommendation of previous interviewees.

In total, 65 HSS academics were interviewed, nine were from Uni-NA, seven from Uni-NB, 11 from Uni-EA, 13 from Uni-EB, ten from Uni-W, and 15 from Uni-C. Interviewees varied in their disciplines (27 humanities and 38 social sciences), academic ranks (21 professors, 29 associate professors, and 15 assistant professors), publications experiences (41 had international publications, while 33 of them published less than five such papers), and education background (31 had a master's, PhD, or joint-PhD degree abroad). Six academics held senior administrative roles in their departments. The distribution of academics' disciplines is displayed in Table 1. The sample was not perfectly balanced. However, as the study covered a wide range of academics and as all interviews were in-depth, adequate information was collected to address the research questions.

Table 1 Interviewees' Disciplines

	Disciplines	Number of interviewees
Humanities (42%)	Chinese	2
	English	11
	French	2
	History	5
	Japanese	3
	Philosophy	4
Social Sciences (58%)	Anthropology	1
	Economics	4
	Education	9
	International relations	2
	Law	8
	Management	2
	Media and communication studies	4
	Politics	1
	Social work	1
	Sociology	6

Interviews were conducted in Chinese between September 2016 and May 2017, lasting from 30 minutes to three hours. Interviews were designed to be semi-structured, guided by questions about the interviewees' academic publication experiences, their perceptions of international and domestic journals and publications, and their responses to incentives schemes.

Coding process started from open coding, to pattern coding for developing categories based on emerged codes (Saldaña 2015), and to clustering, comparing, contrasting, building logical connections between codes, and generating themes (Miles et al. 2014). The categories of affective and behavioural responses and the constructs of typologies, as presented in the following sections, emerged from the coding process.

Interviews were transcribed and analysed in Chinese. When writing in English, the researcher referred to government documents, university websites, and English-medium publications to improve the accuracy of the translation. The back-translation strategy was used to validate the translation of some key terms (Brislin 1970). This study has been approved by

the researcher's university's ethics committee and conducted with full ethical considerations for participants and case study universities.

4. Findings: Typologies of academics' affective and behavioural responses

The coding of interviews with 65 HSS academics revealed two major categories of academics' responses to publication incentives: affective responses (including attitudes towards incentivizing international publications and intentions to publish internationally) and behavioural reaction (encompassing actions to change incentive schemes and efforts to achieve the incentivized goal). The study then proposes two typologies to explore different clusters of affective and behavioural responses.

4.1 Academics' affective responses: a typology

Based on the construct of 'attitudes' and 'intentions', this study proposes a typology of academics' affective responses to incentives, comprising five clusters of responses: proactive, adaptive, resistant, hesitant, and detached (illustrated in Figure 1).

'Attitudes' can 'be used with reference to a person's location on the affective dimension vis-a-vis a given object' (Fishbein & Ajzen 1972 p. 494). As incentive schemes varied across time and institutions, this study focuses on academics' attitudes towards the practice of incentivizing international publications, rather than towards each incentive document.

Academics' attitudes were coded based on the qualitative judgement about the reported degree of positiveness, which can be located on a continuum from 'unfavourable' to 'favourable'. The position of one's attitude depended on their overall perceptions, rather than single statements. For instance, some academics expressed a generally positive attitude towards the implementation of incentive schemes, but they questioned certain regulations in an incentive document. Because of the high level of positiveness, their attitudes were positioned

closer to the end of ‘favourable’.

Social psychologists have proposed a separation between intentions and actual behaviour, and suggested that intentions could serve as a predictor of certain behaviour (Ajzen 2005; Fishbein & Ajzen 1975). The study investigates academics’ intention to achieve the incentivized goal, that is, to publish internationally. Here, ‘intentions to achieve the incentivized goal’ is not a synonym of ‘intentions to follow the incentive’. As will be further discussed, some academics did not intend to follow incentives, but they intended to publish internationally, due to limited choices of domestic journals to publish in.

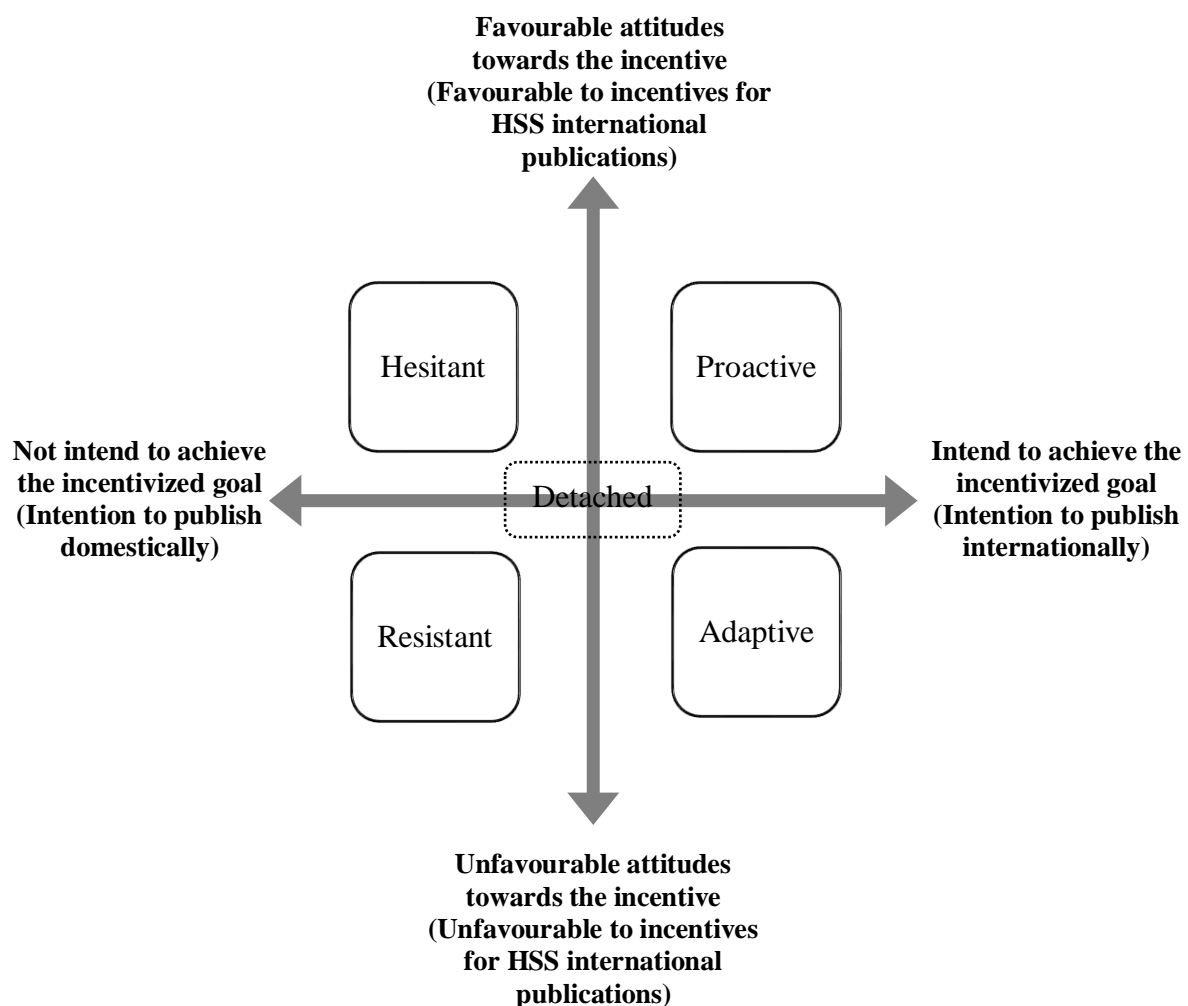
The reported degree of willingness to publish internationally formed the grounds for qualitative judgements. Academics’ intentions to publish internationally formed a continuum from ‘intend to publish internationally’ to ‘intend to publish domestically.’ Logically speaking, the opposite of ‘publishing internationally’ could be publishing in non-international journals or not publishing at all. In the study, ‘non-international journals’ referred to domestic journals, as ‘international journals’ was coined as opposite to ‘domestic journals.’ In addition, none of the interviewees expressed the intention to stop publishing. To publish internationally or domestically was not an ‘either-or’ choice, but a ‘more-less’ probability. Academics intended to publish both internationally and domestically were asked about their priorities and were categorized accordingly.

Interviews revealed both correlations and conflicts between ‘attitudes towards incentives’ and ‘intentions to publish internationally’. Figure 1 displays the dynamics. Academics’ affective responses fall in one of the five categories: proactive, adaptive, resistant, hesitant, and detached. A proactive response represents a favourable attitude and an intention to achieve the incentivized goal. An adaptive response combines an unfavourable attitude with the same intention. A resistant response showcases a favourable attitude and the intention not to achieve the goal. A hesitant response indicates the same intention with an unfavourable

attitude. The central spot where two axes crossed represents a detached response, with a neutral attitude and ambivalence about achieving the incentivized goal.

Academic interviewees' affective responses may move from one category to another at different times. The distinctions among different clusters were not as clear-cut as shown in the figure. Some responses represented a prototype of the cluster, while some were closer to other categories or in-between.

Figure 1 Categories of Academics' Affective Responses to Incentives



4.2 Academics' affective responses to publication incentives

Responses of the 65 HSS academics were unevenly distributed: half of the academics' responses fell into the 'proactive' category (N=34), followed by 'adaptive' (N=14) and

‘resistant’ (N=14), and ‘hesitant’ (N=4). No detached response was reported, thereby the category is dimmed in Figure 1. This distribution does not represent all Chinese HSS academics, since academics with lower intention to publish internationally might not accept interview invitations, which could result in the lower proportion of resistant and hesitant responses.

Academics related their attitudes with their perceptions of the aims and impacts of publication incentives, and of the quality and impact of international publications. Academics’ intention to publish internationally or domestically were related to their research interests, targeted readership, intended impacts, the capability to publish internationally or domestically, and specific assessment requirements.

Proactive

Academics with proactive responses supported incentivizing HSS international publications. They all intended to publish internationally, but some retained the option to publish domestically. While some regarded incentive schemes as important drivers for their intentions to publish internationally, others stated the opposite.

Academics with proactive responses associated incentivization with internationalization. Seven participants considered encouraging international publications as an important national strategy to ‘go out’, echoing the central government’s ‘Going-out’ discourse (Ministry of Education 2011). Some academics perceived those incentives as an essential institutional scheme to improve the university’s global ranking and internationalisation level. Several participants highlighted the significance of internationalisation to individuals’ career development, such as a mid-career academic in Management, who had observed a ‘norm’ in his field to publish internationally (Academic-C8). He argued that since the internationalisation of research was inevitable, universities should incentivize and assist academics to participate in this global trend, before it became too late.

His opinion was shared by academics across disciplines and career stages, such as an Assistant Professor in Anthropology (Academic-EA3), an Associate Professor in Law (Academic-W3), and a Professor in English (Academic-NB2).

The practice of incentivizing international publications corresponded to some participants' perceptions of the quality and value of international publications. Academic-W5 (Professor in Media and Communication studies) supported the practice, as he thought international publications were better than Chinese publications in his field, regarding 'the conformity to research standards, the use of methodology, the depth of the research, and the length of the article'. The 'quality gap' was also reported in other fields. Some perceived domestic journals as less rigorous (Academic-W10, Associate Professor in Education), arguing that the review procedure was not well-established (Academic-NB2, Professor in English). Therefore, they considered it beneficial for academics to publish internationally, because 'the sense of achievement will be higher' (Academic-EA9, Associate Professor in Philosophy), 'the research quality can be testified' (Academic-NA9, Assistant Professor in French), and more academics will 'comply with international standards and improve their research' (Academic-EA2, Associate Professor in English).

Often, academics expressed a generally supportive attitude, but tempered it with worries or complaint, with the desire to improve current incentives. For instance, Academic-EA7 (Associate Professor in Media and Communication Studies) observed that current incentives were 'problematic', as they depended heavily on publication numbers and impact factors. Nonetheless, he was content with the practice of incentivization, believing that 'there is no perfect way to do it after all' and 'we can always improve incentive approaches'.

Some academics associated their intention to publish internationally with the direct or indirect benefits attached to incentives. Academic-C15 did his PhD in Education abroad, when he found SSCI publications were 'essential' in many Chinese universities' job advertisements.

Therefore, he decided to publish SSCI papers, which helped him in job application. As an early career researcher, he did not have many research projects now, so he said he had to be ‘strategic’ about where to publish and ‘follow the incentives’. Academic-W5 (Professor in Media and Communication studies) had observed the prevalence of incentives for SSCI publications. Therefore, he had shifted his focus from domestic publications to international publications, published two SSCI papers and was soon promoted to professor ‘owing to the SSCI publications’. Academic-C12 (Assistant Professor in Economics) and Academic-W7 (Associate Professor in Law) also highlighted the importance of incentive policies when explaining their publication choices.

Some academics emphasized their research interests and targeted audience, rather than incentives, in their intention to publish internationally. Most of them held tenure positions or had completed evaluation requirements for their un-tenured positions. They explained that academics publish not for the sake of rewards, ‘but for the sake of research’ (Academic-EA6, Associate Professor in English) or ‘for the sake of personal development’ (Academic-C3, Associate Professor in Social Work; Academic-NB4, Associate Professor in Sociology). ‘If you can publish internationally, you will do that with or without incentives; but if you cannot, incentives make no difference’, commented Academic-NB2, a Professor in English.

International or domestic publications was not an ‘either-or’ choice. Despite their priorities in international publications, some participants reserved the option to publish in domestic journals. Their choices were subject to whether the research topic was ‘more domestically-related’ (Academic-EA11, Associate Professor in Education) and whether ‘the research is helpful to China’ (Academic-C11, Associate Professor in Education).

Adaptive

Some academics were not favourable to the incentivization of international publications. But

they intended to publish internationally, because of the evaluative pressure or the difficulty in domestic publications.

Those academics had doubts about the aims and effects of publication incentives. They were concerned that the over-emphasis on publication numbers might overshadow the significance of research quality in the evaluation and academic life (Academic-EA1, Professor in History). They noted that to evaluate research quality, peer review may be more reliable than whether the article had been published in an SSCI journal (Academic-EA5, Assistant Professor in Law; Academic-W9, Professor in English). Eight out of the 14 academics with an adaptive response questioned the ‘utilitarian culture’ or the ‘pursuit of fame and wealth’ (Academic-C1, Associate Professor in English) denoted by publication incentives, arguing that external rewards could be ‘at odds with the intrinsic value of academic research and the pursuit of truth’ (Academic-W9, Professor in English).

Some participants challenged the value and impact of international publications. Academic-EB4 in Media and Communication Studies and Academic-EA8 in Law questioned the perceived ‘quality gap’ and commented that if some international publications were translated back into Chinese, it would be obvious that the research quality was equal to average Chinese-medium publications, or even worse. Some argued that in HSS areas, research interests and questions took roots in the socio-cultural context of each country. Hence, those participants believed that international journals, mostly Euro-American journals, cared more about ‘how to solve their problems, not ours’ (Academic-EA5, Assistant Professor in Law), thus overlooking ‘big questions in China or other questions worth exploring’ (Academic-EB4).

Despite their reservations, some academics intended to publish internationally, as a ‘compromise’ to the ‘problematic evaluation systems’ (Academic-W9, Professor in English) and a proof of their competency to ‘survive the system’ (Academic-EA1, Professor in History). As Academic-EA1 stated:

Rewards are high, so why not publish a few to prove that ‘I can do this’. After this, you can do whatever you like. Individuals have the personal pursuit of dreams, but sometimes, we have to bow to reality.

Some academics emphasized that their targeted readership was outside Chinese academia, and that publishing in international journals was a necessity for their academic life. Academic-EB2 is an Assistant Professor in Asian History. He was not favourable to publication incentives, but he felt compulsory to publish internationally, because ‘western academics’ ability to read Chinese has been decreasing’, so publications in Chinese might be ignored due to the language barrier. ‘It is the same for East-Asian academia, including Japan and South Korea. If you want to raise a new point and exchange ideas with others, it has to be put in English,’ he concluded.

Returnee academics during their ‘transitional period’ upon returning (Academic-C1, Associate Professor in English; Academic-NB3, Associate Professor in Japanese; Academic-NA9, Assistant Professor in French) decided to publish internationally, because they found domestic publications more difficult. Academic-C1 and Academic-NB3 shared ‘painful’ experiences of switching back to Chinese academic writing in the first few years of returning. For returnee academics, publishing in international journals was considered more ‘convenient’ (Academic-EA5, Assistant Professor in Law), because most of them had received doctoral training in English. They reported being more adapted to writing academic articles in English. In addition, their doctoral theses were mostly written in English; thereby can be revised into international publications.

In small or emerging research areas, there was a lack of domestic journals to publish in. For instance, Academic-C10 conducted research on frontier issues in domestic academia. He

struggled to find domestic journals whose aim and scope would match his research interests. Comparatively, he had ‘far more choices of international journals to contribute to’, hence the decision to focus on international publications.

For some junior academics, publishing internationally was considered as a ‘gateway’ to escape from the ‘academic monopoly’ within domestic academia (Academic-EA8, Associate Professor in Law). Academic-EA8, Academic-W3 (Associate Professor in Law), and Academic-C5 (Associate Professor in Education) have described a perceived ‘Matthew Effect’ in Law and Education, that established academics tended to have easier access to resources in China, including top domestic publications, because of their prestigious status. Comparatively, international journals were considered as alternatives to junior academics, as they were less controlled by established academics in domestic academia.

Resistant

Some academics held unfavourable attitudes towards the incentives and expressed less or no intention to publish internationally. Half of them faced no pending evaluative pressures, with a tenure position obtained or well-promised. They questioned the legitimacy of incentivizing international publications and doubted the quality and value of international publications. Academic-W4 have criticized the ‘English hegemony’, ‘sense of xenophilia’, and ‘dangers of alienation’ associated with incentives for international publications in the HSS. Academic-EA10 (Professor in English) was worried that incentives ‘may result in actions for short-term benefits’, and lead to publications ‘without considering the value and meaning of research’.

Incentives had discouraged some academics to publish internationally, such as described by Academic-W4 (Professor in Sociology): ‘I felt rebellious towards that.’ He said that encouraging international publications might be beneficial, but when it became compulsory to publish in certain journals required by the institution, it could cause a sense of

refusal. Academic-NA4 (Professor in English) and Academic-C13 (Associate Professor in Law) also expressed ‘rebellious feelings’ towards ‘the compulsion’.

Some academics believed their research areas were more suitable for domestic publications. Academic-C7 was limited in his choice of journals as a Professor in Chinese literature, and he held the opinion that the research on Chinese language and literature should be conducted and conveyed in Chinese. Intended impacts, either on academia or on society, was another influential factor. Academic-NA4 (Professor in English) and Academic-EA5 (Assistant Professor in Law) both had SSCI publications, but they intended to conduct research ‘addressing the pending questions in China’, thus ‘are focusing on Chinese publications’. Academic-EB12, an Associate Professor in educational studies, stated that:

Educational research is not universal. It is closely associated with each country’s context. ... I am concerned about the burning questions Chinese universities are facing; therefore, I want to take roots in the Chinese context. ... Educational research also has practical implications, so I hope policymakers at Chinese universities could read my research. ... As they would not read many English publications, the best way is to publish in Chinese.

Hesitant

Academics with hesitant responses held favourable attitudes towards incentivizing HSS international publications, with similar reasons provided by academics with proactive stances. However, they did not intend to publish internationally, due to either self-reported lack of competence, or the concern about achieving the required publication number for evaluation.

The perceived difficulty in writing and publishing academic papers in English was a major hinderance reported by those academics. For instance, Academic-C2 (Professor in

Education) had received his doctoral training in China many years ago. He expressed highly favourable attitudes towards the incentives, but he did not intend to publish internationally, as he was worried about writing English articles. He found himself lacking in training opportunities for academic English writing and felt it impossible to switch his ‘traditional’ research methods to the ‘popular’ and ‘favoured’ quantitative methods used in many international publications.

Academic-W8 (Associate Professor in Sociology) was concerned with the required number of publications for tenure promotion. Uni-W encouraged international publications, but domestic publications were also recognized, although with fewer bonuses attached. Compared to the ‘unpredictable’ review and revision time for international publications, the timeframe of publishing in Chinese journals was ‘more controllable’ to him. To ensure enough publication number for promotion, he preferred domestic publications at the current stage, although he had a PhD degree from an English-speaking country. He said: ‘After I become a professor, I will be able to follow my own interest and publish wherever I want.’ The statement somehow indicated a possible change to ‘proactive’ response in the future.

4.3 Academics’ behavioural responses: a typology

Based on academics’ actions to change incentives and their efforts to achieve the incentivized goal, this study proposes a typology of academics’ behavioural responses to incentives, encompassing four clusters of responses: reforming, reconciling, rebelling, and rejecting (illustrated in Figure 2).

Academics’ actions can be divided into ‘taking actions to change’ and ‘no actions to change’. Those actions include efforts to change the status quo of incentivizing HSS international publications and attempts to advise on a specific incentive document.

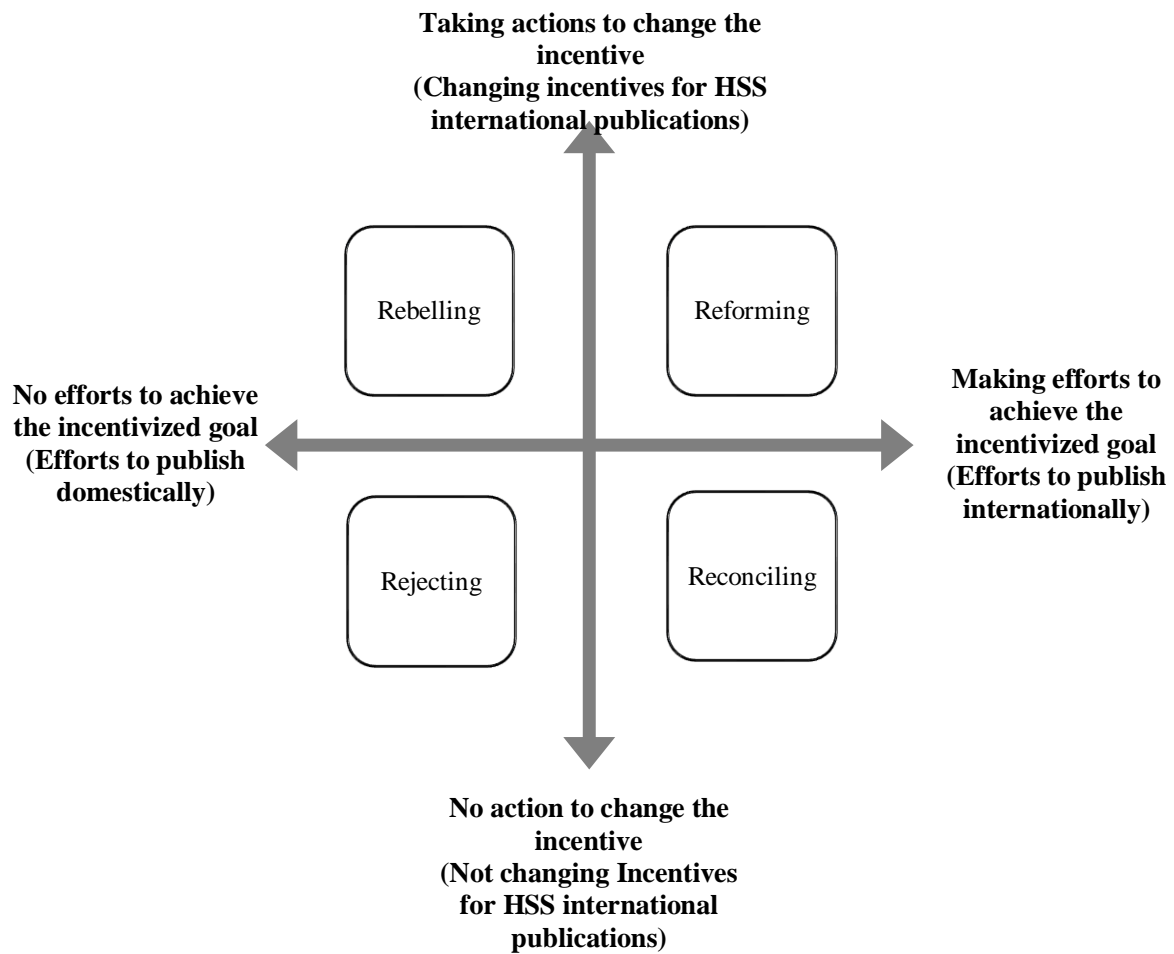
Whether academics are making efforts to achieve the incentivized goal, that is, to

publish internationally, formed the other axis. This study defined ‘efforts to publish domestically’ as the opposite to ‘efforts to publish internationally’, as ‘international publications’ were the constructed antonym to ‘domestic publications’ in the study, and that none academics reported the action to stop publishing. Same with intentions to publish, efforts to publish internationally or domestically represent a ‘more-or-less’ preference, rather than an ‘either-or’ choice.

Correlations and conflicts existed between ‘actions to change incentives’ and ‘efforts to achieve the incentivized goal.’ Figure 2 captures the variation. Academics’ behavioural responses fell in one of the four categories: reforming, reconciling, rebelling, and rejecting. A reformative response combines actions to change incentives and efforts to achieve the incentivized goal. A reconciling response represents no actions to change incentives with the same efforts to achieve goals. A rebellious response illustrates actions to change incentives and the refusal to make efforts. A rejecting response indicates no actions to change and no efforts to reach the goal. As there is no ambivalence between ‘actions’ and ‘no actions’, there is no fifth type on the central spot, as in the typology of affective responses.

Academics’ behavioural responses may change across time. Some responses were optimized representations of their clusters, while some were in-between or closer to other categories. Actions and efforts were related to attitudes and intentions, but were not always corresponding to them. Academics with unfavourable attitudes towards incentives may be eager to change them or take no actions. Academics with the intention to publish internationally may not make efforts to do so, because of a lack of knowledge or support. As showcased in the statement of Academic-W1, an Associate Professor in English Studies: ‘I want to publish internationally, but I do not yet know how.’ She explained that she did not have much research experiences abroad, so she is unfamiliar with publishing in international journals. Training on publishing in international journals would be helpful, she noted.

Figure 2 Categories of Academics' Behavioural Responses to Incentives



4.4 Academics' behavioural responses to publication incentives

'Incentives are like the conductor's baton.' Six interviewees commented. Whether to perform under the 'baton' or not, participants responded differently. More than half of the participants showcased a 'reconciling' response (N=40), followed by 'rejecting' (N=17), 'reforming' (N=7), and 'rebellious' (N=2). This distribution represents academics interviewed, not all Chinese HSS academics, as those with 'reforming' and 'rebellious' responses may have not participated in the study. However, the distribution is telling, considering the participants were recruited from largely diversified backgrounds and institutions. Academics' engagement with incentives were associated with their attitudes and the perceived power-relation between administration and

academia. Academics' efforts to publish were influenced by intentions and personal factors.

Reconciling

Those participants did not attempt to change the status quo and were making efforts to publish articles in international journals. Some academics displayed a proactive response, expressing favourable attitudes and the intention to publish internationally. Some were adaptive in their affective responses. They perceived incentives negatively but were not trying to change them. Often, those participants were not engaged in the top-down policymaking process of incentive schemes.

Several participants reported a lack of personal agency coupled with a sense of exclusion and helplessness. Academic-EB9, a Professor in History said he had observed 'an invasion of administrative power in academic community'. 'I am feeling powerlessness to change the system', said Academic-C3, an Associate Professor in Social Work. Facing the loss of personal agency, three participants remarked that 'leadership (must) have their own considerations.' Interviewees explained that they understood the 'impossibility of developing a perfect research system' (Academic-C12, Assistant Professor in Economics), 'the difficulty in policymaking, which is both a science and an art' (Academic-EA7, Associate Professor in Media and Communication Studies), as well as the complexity to balance internationalisation, rankings, impacts, research quality, and faculty development (Academic-C3, Associate Professor in Social Work; Academic-NA7, Assistant Professor in International Relations; Academic-EB13, Assistant Professor in Sociology).

Academics' efforts to publish internationally included developing international collaborations (discussed by 23 participants), conducting overseas academic visits, especially to English-speaking countries (reported by 14), and participating in international conferences to network and present their research (talked by 13). Six academics described their practices of

tailoring submissions to certain international journals, including adjusting research focus from domestic questions to those international readers may be interested in, selecting certain samples that are lacking in international literature, and applying quantitative research methods that they perceived as more widely-used in global social sciences research. They believed that, in general, international journals have different ‘tastes’ (Academic-EB10, Professor in Economics) from domestic ones, methodologically, thematically, epistemically, and linguistically.

Rejecting

Academics taking no action to reform incentives and not trying to publish internationally suggested a rejecting response. Some expressed hesitant affective responses and were not content with incentives, such as Academic-W1 (Associate Professor in English) and Academic-C2 (Professor in Education), but they reported self-perceived incapability to publish internationally. Some displayed adaptive or resistant affective responses. They were ‘resentful’ at the incentives (Academic-EB11, Associate Professor in History), but they stayed silent, as they perceived themselves as less ‘impactful’ and ‘powerful’ than policymakers (Academic-NB1, Assistant Professor in Japanese). Academic-W4 (Professor in Sociology) noted the ‘inevitable conflicts’ between administration and individuals:

We must have regulations for groups of individuals. No rules, no standards. But it is complicated. Good regulations will consider individuals; bad regulations will suppress them. Assessment based on numbers is easy and convenient. But humanity is too complex to evaluate.

Academic-W4 said that by ‘not following the baton’, he was demonstrating his discontent with incentive schemes. Similarly, Academic-EA10 (Professor in English)

commented that ‘when administrative guidance went against academic values’, she chose to ‘stay firm’ and ‘not to follow the baton’.

Some academics attempted to improve the quality and reputation of domestic journals, as a form of rejection. Since domestic journals were perceived as less rigorous than international publications in peer reviews, Academic-EB12 (Associate Professor in Education) advocated that ‘the improvement relies on the academic community’s efforts, rather than the administrative power’. When reviewing for domestic journals, she ‘always spent long hours providing thorough comments’, in attempts to ‘contribute what I can to make a difference’.

Reforming

Several academics took a reformative response, actively seeking changes to incentive while making efforts to publish internationally. Their efforts to publish internationally were similar to those with reconciling responses. They held unfavourable attitudes or favourable attitudes with reservations towards incentive schemes. Some of them served both academic and management roles. The dual-identity made them ‘anxious’ when facing the pressure of accountability and ranking implied in incentive schemes, while ‘fully understanding academics’ pressure to publish’ (Academic-NA2, Professor in French; Academic-W2, Associate Professor in Law; Academic-W10, Associate Professor in Education). Academic-W2 supported incentive schemes as a departmental leader, hoping to encourage academics’ participation in internationalisation and improve departmental ranking and visibility. But he ‘acknowledged the pressures on academics’ and ‘recognized the pitfalls’ in current metric-based incentive schemes. Therefore, he was working to improve certain regulations.

Academics without management roles also acted. Academic-NB3 (Associate Professor in Japanese) ‘had fought for years’, together with her colleagues, to persuade their department to recognize top publications in foreign languages other than English. Academic-

W9 challenged the notion that ‘academia is under the baton of administrative power.’ When chances came, she said she always talk to departmental leadership to abolish ‘illogical’ and ‘abnormal’ regulations, which she considered as ‘stumbling blocks’ in academics’ way to pursue the truth. She said:

My opinions may not change anything. I am only an associate professor, not a dean, not an Academician, not a big name. ... But I am doing what I can. Every time department leaders asked the faculty’s views, I will speak out my opinions.

Rebelling

Two academics with rebellious response were attempting to change incentives and making no or fewer efforts to publish internationally. One participant held a managerial role, while the other did not. Academic-EB1 had advised university leaders as an established Professor in Education, about the limitations of relying on metrics to evaluate HSS research. Academic-EA4, a Professor in Media and Communication Studies, focused on writing monographs in Chinese, rather than trying to publish internationally, as he perceived monographs as more important carriers of knowledge in the HSS. He also challenged incentive schemes’ emphasis on publication numbers. He once told university leaders that Lu Yu, the ancient Sage of Tea in China ‘would have been kicked out if he worked at Uni-EA, because he had spent all his life producing only one book (*The Classic of Tea*, the first definitive work on tea in the world)’.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1 The conceptualisation of academics' responses to incentives

Individuals' responses to institutional changes can be conceptualized into different categories with the construct of different factors. The categorization in this study develops the typologies in the previous literature (Merton 1968; Trowler 1998). It has identified and separated two dimensions, namely affective and behavioural responses. This deliberate separation allows room for exploring the correlation and conflicts between affective reactions and actual behaviour. For instance, participants with a proactive stance reported various behavioural responses, including to reconcile with or reform incentivization. The conflicts may not be captured, if affective and behavioural responses were mixed.

The typologies also distinguish between 'the intention/efforts to achieve the incentivized goal' and 'the intention/efforts to follow the incentive'. For some individuals, achieving the incentivized goal is not a decision motivated, strengthened, or imposed by incentives, such as academics with limited choices of domestic journals. They had to publish internationally, with or without publication incentives. By focusing on 'the intention/efforts to achieve the incentivized goal', the typologies are able to unpack and illustrate the inconsistency between the incentivized goal and personal goal. Therefore, those typologies could be useful where there is a mismatch those goals.

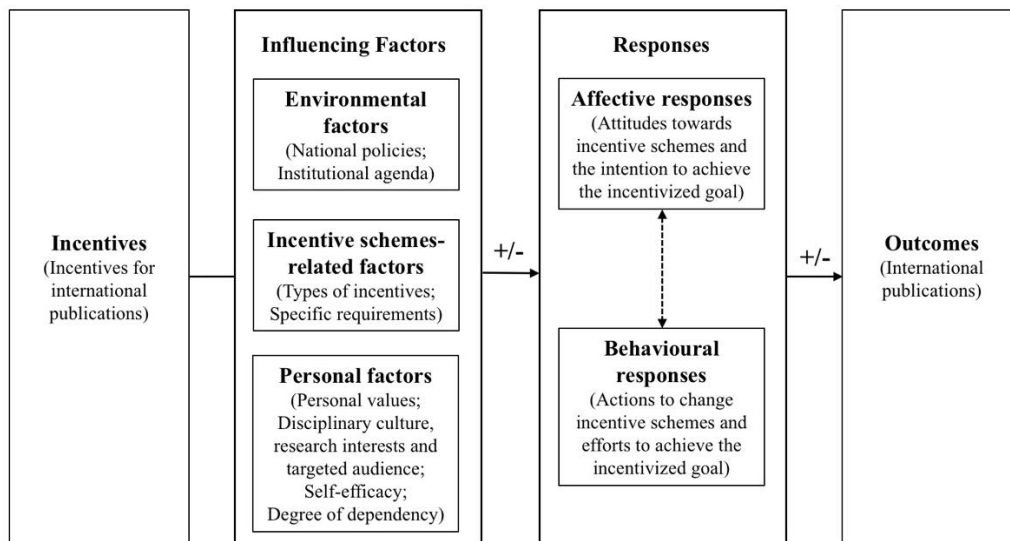
However, the typologies are limited in that they only capture a snapshot, rather than a dynamic presentation of the responses. Further investigations could incorporate more dimensions of research life, such as the 'epistemic living spaces', which encompass the epistemic, spatial/material, temporal, symbolic, and social dimensions that mould, guide, and delimit academics' actions and behaviours in research (Felt 2009; Felt & Fochler 2012).

5.2 The causality between incentives and outcomes

The number of SSCI and A&HCI publications at six case universities have all increased since the publication of their first incentives. However, it remains a question of whether there exists a direct causal relationship between publication incentives and the increased publication number. It is long debatable *whether*, *when*, and *how* the implementations of incentive policies could lead to changes in publication behaviours and publication numbers (Gläser 2017; Hicks 2017; Müller & De Rijcke 2017). For instance, Hammarfelt and De Rijcke (2015) revealed changes in publication patterns of researchers at a Swedish university, while acknowledging that they ‘cannot make the causal claim’, as although systems ‘seem to be able to influence publication practices’, ‘the extent of their influence is difficult to estimate’ (p. 74).

Findings of the current study support the argument that the relationship between incentives and outcomes are complicated than an automatic positive causal relationship. To illustrate a possible interpretation, the study proposes a framework (Figure 3), drawing on factors synthesized from the Findings section and Bonner and Sprinkle’s study (2002). It shows the incentivization could impact academics’ publications in both positive and negative ways. The influences of incentives are transferred and translated through environmental factors, incentive schemes-related factors, personal factors, and individuals’ affective and behavioural responses. This framework is not a statistical model, but intends to present one possible explanation.

Figure 3 A Framework for Incentives and Outcomes



Environmental factors

Environmental factors include external variables associated with incentives. National policies and institutional agenda were important environmental factors in the study. National policies could draw academics' attention to certain political discourse. Such as noted in section 4.2, seven participants supported the national 'going-out' policy orientation, thus displaying favourable attitudes towards incentives and stronger intentions to publish internationally.

Institutional agenda could also affect academics' responses. Most interviewees considered the gist of incentives for international publications as promoting internationalisation, coupled with other institutional strategies such as employing returnee academics. They perceived publication incentives as 'the signal released by the university' (Academic-C8, Associate Professor in Management) or 'the leverage for internationalisation' (Academic-EA8, Associate Professor in Law). In turn, academics intended to prepare themselves accordingly by accumulating more international publications.

Incentive scheme-related factors

Factors specific to an incentive scheme, particularly the types of incentives and specific requirements, could influence academics' responses. Academics responded to monetary incentives and career-related incentives differently. Some pointed out monetary incentives could help with some academics because of the low salary level in Chinese academia. However, ten participants complained about the low reward value of monetary incentives for HSS international publications, as compared with science and technology publications. Some interviewees associated financial rewards with a derogatory connotation of utilitarian culture, thus displaying an unfavourable attitude.

Compared with monetary incentives, interviewees expressed more concerns with career-related ones, particularly in institutions where international publications were becoming mandatory in research assessment and tenure promotion. In some cases, mandatory incentives can drive academics to publish internationally, despite their reported discontent with incentive schemes, as showcased by academics with reconciling responses. Nonetheless, mandatory incentives could also discourage academics and generate rebellious feelings. Some academics with resistant, rejecting, and rebelling responses exemplify the case.

Requiring a certain number of publications in a restrained timeframe could discourage academics. Many interviewees reported experiencing a longer time period for international publication. To secure their jobs and titles, some decided to publish domestically at certain career stages. The comment of Academic-W8 that 'after I become a professor, I will be able to ... publish wherever I want' illustrates the situation.

Personal factors

Influential personal factors include academics' values, disciplinary cultures, self-efficacy, and the degree of dependency on incentive schemes.

Academics who valued extrinsic motivations of research welcomed incentive schemes, which provided bonuses for their academic work. However, those pursuing the intrinsic value of research felt being challenged by publication incentives, which were largely related to external good such as monetary rewards or career-related benefits. Those academics advocated for ‘publication for the sake of research’, ‘not for the sake of incentives’ (Academic-C3, Associate Professor in Social Work; Academic-NB4, Associate Professor in Sociology; Academic-EA6, Associate Professor in English). Some academics had conformed to external incentives, some of which at odds with aspects of their academic values. However, some academics with resistant, hesitant, rejecting, and rebelling responses reported a refusal to achieve the incentive’s aim. This is consistent with findings in the management and psychology literature that monetary incentives may backfire, as providing external bonuses could crowd out one’s own intrinsic motivation (e.g. Deci, 1971; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Academics reside in different disciplinary tribes, who share and internalize certain cultures together (Becher 1989; Clark 1989). In the study, participants from different disciplines held various perceptions of the quality of international publications, the intended impacts and readership, the norms of English or Chinese language writing, the lack of international or domestic journals in specific fields, and the perceived ‘academic monopoly’ in their fields. Within each discipline, academics’ research interests and readership could also vary, leading to diversified responses.

Self-efficacy is the judgement of ‘how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations’ (Bandura 1982 p. 122). Participants associated their self-efficacy in international publication with their self-evaluated English proficiency, research training, education background, publication experiences, and international experiences. Incentives work with academics considering themselves as capable of publishing internationally. However, incentives appear to demoralize academics with low self-efficacy,

leading to hesitant, resistant, rebelling, or rejecting responses. For instance, 61 per cent of the participants with international publications expressed a proactive response, while the rate for proactive responses is much lower among those without international publications, counting for only 33 per cent. Except for 'proactive' and 'reconciling' responses (63 percent among those with international publications and 58 per cent among those without), the next common responses among academics who had published internationally was 'adaptive' (20 percent). However, for those without international publications, the next common responses were 'rejecting' (38 per cent) and 'resistant' (33 percent). Similarly, the percentage of negative responses was higher among academics without international education background: 33 per cent for 'hesitant' and 'resistant' responses, while 22 per cent among those with international education experiences. The percentages for 'rebellious' and 'rejecting' responses followed the same pattern: 32 per cent among those without overseas degrees, versus 23 per cent among those received degrees abroad.

Some academics expressed a higher level of dependency on incentives than others. Some welcomed monetary bonuses, while others were not concerned with the bonus value. Some relied on career-related incentives for promotion, while others had secured their academic ranks. For instance, none of the 15 assistant professors expressed 'hesitant', 'rebellious', or 'reforming' responses, while those responses were expressed by either professors, or associate professors who did not have pending evaluative pressures. The 'reconciling' responses were most common among assistant professors (80 per cent, 12 out of 15 assistant professors), followed by associate professors (62 per cent), and professors (48 per cent). On the contrary, 'rejecting' responses were most common among professors (29 per cent, 6 out of 21 professors), followed by associate professors (24 per cent), and assistant professors (20 per cent). Those more dependent on incentives were not all positive about incentive

schemes, but they voluntarily or involuntarily became active in their intentions and efforts to publish internationally.

Academics' responses and the outcome of incentives

The study identifies the association and mismatch between academics' affective and behavioural responses. For instance, academics with 'proactive' and 'adaptive' responses often reported making efforts to publish internationally. However, among academics with an adaptive response, 11 displayed a reconciling behavioural response and four were 'reforming'.

Whether academics had intentions to achieve the incentivized goal and were making efforts could impact the outcome of incentives. In the study, academics with strong intentions to publish internationally and had devoted themselves to international publication may generate more such publications. In contrast, academics who chose to focus on domestic publications would not achieve the aim of incentive schemes and have more international publications.

To summarize, when certain conditions are met, incentives could powerfully shape academics' publication behaviour towards the intended outcome. In the study, the large proportion of participants with proactive, adaptive, reconciling, or reforming responses indicates a general positive relationship between incentives and international publications. However, incentives and outcomes do not always follow the positive causal relationship. Depending on environmental, institutional, and personal factors, and on academics affective and behavioural responses, incentives could work positively to boost international publications, or negatively to disincentivise such publications.

5.3 Academics 'under the baton of administrative power'

Incentives for HSS international publications have increased the institutional accountability of Chinese HSS academics and positioned them as 'managed professionals' (Blackmore 2003 p.

5). Findings of the study suggest that current incentive schemes could challenge or even suppress academics' autonomy. This is particularly illustrated by participants with adaptive and reconciling responses. Some of them were unfavourable towards publication incentives, but they intended to publish internationally or did not make efforts to change current incentives. Participants have expressed a lack of agency under administrative power, a feeling of powerlessness against organisational arrangements, and a sense of exclusion from institutional decisions, which hindered them to negotiate with current incentive systems. This has led to 'compromises' as depicted by Academic-EA1 and Academic-W9. Although there were limited cases of resistant, hesitant, rebelling, and reforming responses, which suggest challenges to the system, most participants with such responses did not face evaluative pressures. They were not playing the game, so they faced less penalty for rebelling against it. The diminishing of agency echoes Fanghanel's (2012) observation that academics are lacking in the agency in managed research. To address this issue, the study suggests universities to engage HSS academics in decision-making, rather than imposing incentive schemes upon them. This corresponds to Ochsner, Hug, and Galleron's argument, that the assessment of HSS research is delicate, and that a bottom-up evaluation approach should be encouraged (Ochsner et al. 2017).

To conclude, this study finds that external incentives may not always serve as an enabler for academics to publish internationally. Consequently, universities could design incentive schemes that 'appeal to individual researchers' value systems and goals', and to create 'the structural and contextual conditions' necessary for individuals to realize these values and goals, actively and with integrity (Oancea 2018 p. 3). For example, universities could provide support and training on academic English writing and editing, as some participants considered it as the major hindrance. Most importantly, the study proposes to move incentive schemes beyond managerialism and towards the integration of intrinsic academic values. Rather than simply counting the number of publications in certain journals selected by

the administrative power, incentive schemes could be designed to incorporate scholarly judgements into policymaking, highlight the intrinsic value and academic quality of research, respect variations among individuals and disciplines, and encourage impacts both domestically and internationally.

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ⁱ This study focuses on Chinese HSS academics, excluding foreign academics employed by Chinese universities. The decision was because foreign academics comprise only 0.77 per cent of all faculty members in Chinese higher education institutions (Ministry of Education n.d.), who are not yet the major academic groups in Chinese higher education. In addition, foreign academics' experiences of publishing in internationally-indexed journals may be fundamentally different from Chinese academics, which is beyond the scope of this study.