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# **INTERNATIONAL STAFF MOBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: TO WHAT EXTENT COULD AN INTRA-EUROPEAN ENTREPRENEURIAL APPROACH BE APPLIED TO SINO-CEE INITIATIVES?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The promotion of international staff mobility is a founding principle the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which includes CEE countries. Meanwhile, the Chinese government encourages Chinese universities to internationalise and exchange staff, while focussing on Central and Eastern Europe to develop relationships in the EU. Combining theory in international strategy execution through entrepreneurship, strategic entrepreneurship and cultural difference theories, this study is devised to investigate the implementation of staff mobility in a cross-cultural context. A unique, two-phase research methodology was devised to investigate the effects of culture, as an informal institution, on implementing staff mobility through strategic entrepreneurship and the feasibility of the transfer of such an approach from intra-EHEA mobility to Sino-EHEA mobility. A first-, second and third-person Insider Action Research (AR) approach was used to organise and implement an international staff exchange between universities within the EHEA, followed by a series of in-depth interviews with Chinese academics on exchange in Europe. Results showed the importance of entrepreneurial individuals in the implementation of strategy. There were marked similarities in the importance of a support network, often provided by the exchanger's family, and in institutional attitudes to supporting these networks. Differences in entrepreneurial intensity between institutions as a result of organisational and national cultures affected the behaviour of individuals and this determines the strategy used to implement the exchange. Evidence of the paradoxical behaviour pattern in China and the significant cultural differences within the EHEA is presented as a starting point for Sino-CEE mobility strategy development in an existing institutional-based tradition: an entrepreneurial intra-EHEA strategy cannot simply be transferred to a Sino-EHEA context. Specific recommendations are therefore made.

**Keywords:** staff mobility, internationalisation strategy, higher education, entrepreneurship, culture.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

It is evident that cultural globalisation has “*ushered in a new era in higher education*” (Marginson/van der Wende 2007:3). According to Altbach and Lewis (1996), international scholarship has followed the blurring of national boundaries and increasing national interdependency in the industry. Many policy makers and scholars asseverate the need for higher education institutions to internationalise (Adams /Carfagna 2006; Friedman 2005; Green 2003; Grünzweig/Rinehart 2002), including international staff exchange. Many HE internationalisation strategies include a statement regarding the ‘encouragement’ of international staff mobility (Harris 2008; Killick 2007) but none goes further in explaining how this might be achieved. The internationalisation of university staff is less well-researched than that of the student (Christie/Barron/D’Annunzio-Green 2013; Knight 2003; Guo/ Chase 2011), especially through international staff exchange. Very little is understood regarding the strategic execution of international staff mobility.

The Chinese education system is the largest in the world. Going back three thousand years, the indigenous tradition (e.g. Confucius) has had a significant influence on the Chinese higher education (HE) system. The contents of learning were drawn mainly from classical texts of Confucian teaching. In 1949, China’s HE system was restructured to be highly controlled by central government. Over the past two decades, economic development in China has stimulated reforms which have attracted Western educators, resulting in student and staff mobility between Chinese and Western

universities. In the newly developed market economy, many Chinese universities aim for worldwide recognition and further reform is predicted.

In Europe, international political agreements have driven the harmonisation of the HE system at a regional level and resulted in a supra-nationally standardised approach to internationalisation (Vaira 2004). The *Bologna Declaration* was signed by 29 countries in June 1999. 17 countries from Central and Eastern Europe joined between 2001-2005, creating a 'two-speed Bologna' (Deca 2010). The overarching objective of the 'Bologna Process' was to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 to increase the global competitiveness of European HE systems. The promotion of mobility is one of its founding principles. Major changes have taken place in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) HE since the early 1990s (Sadlak 2009): a departure from the previous conceptual and administrative model and an 'educational boom' in student enrolments. The countries of this region were given an opportunity to escape the past which required "*courage, ingenuity, determination and not least, luck.*" (5) on the road to the normalcy and development of HE which has occurred in recent years. China and CEE have strengthened ties throughout 2012/13 (Liu 2013). The Inaugural Conference of the China-CEE Co-operation Secretariat in 2012 signalled expanding collaboration and new initiatives to accommodate future developments: CEE is therefore a link between 'old Europe' and a new relationship with China, with greater opportunities to develop true Sino-European staff mobility initiatives within HE.

The literature on the internationalisation of business suggests that culture clash and its impact on business performance are often complex and difficult to predict (Hofstede 1983). Misunderstanding of cultural differences between groups of people in different institutions creates difficulties for not just in strategic planning, but also in the execution

of developed strategies (Leknes/ Carr 2004). The implications of cultural differences on business management have been studied from a range of perspectives by scholars (Barkema/Bell/Pennings 1996; Kumar/Nti 2004).

Nevertheless, sufficient understanding of international staff mobility in the HE context is lacking and non-existent in CEE. In light of the limits of prior research in international staff mobility, the aim of this study was to explore the implementation of staff exchange in a cross-cultural context. To create a new theoretical lens, we combine theory on internationalisation in the HE sector, entrepreneurship and paradoxical culture, focussing on issues of strategy implementation.. While existing literature touches upon cultural issues which impact on strategic execution, none explore implementation in the context of international staff exchange in the HE industry. It has been asserted that most studies neglect the cultural background of the entrepreneur (Wdowiak et al; 2012). . The shape and pace of entrepreneurship in the emerging economies of CEE is significantly determined by the dominant influence of the institutional environment (Smallbone / Welter, 2001, 2006), which includes higher education. Empirical research has so far failed to to measure the complex effect of informal institutions (such as national and organisational culture) on entrepreneurialism in these environments (Manolova et al, 2008).

This paper starts to fill this gap by establishing whether or not an entrepreneurial approach to mobility could simply be transplanted through the EHEA and is offered as a starting point for research within CEE specifically. CEE research has highlighted the importance of contextual influences such as institutions, advancing an institution-based view of business strategy as a complementary perspective (Meyer / Peng, 2005). This work is in the same vein.

This paper also links entrepreneurship to international mobility for the first time, distilling the existing theory and research findings into clear recommendations for executing this aspect of internationalisation strategy in and between European and Chinese Higher Education. The usefulness of strategic entrepreneurship (Burgelman 1983) to the internationalisation of higher education was recently established (Pearce, 2014). Further evidence of Fang's (2008) paradoxical behaviour is offered, not only in Chinese participants but also in Europeans. This study confirms the paradoxical behaviour patterns identified by other Chinese scholars (Fang 2003, 2008, 2010 and Leung 2008).

### ***1.1 On Straddling the Public & Private Sectors***

Education is now regarded as an engine of economic and international competitiveness (Welch, 2002) and most governments want universities to serve national interests in a global context so they increasingly emphasise the practical and technical value of HE (Currie, 2004). Under pressure from diminishing public funding levels, increasing competition and intensifying environmental turbulence, universities worldwide have become huge, international enterprises forced to re-evaluate their strategies (Grigg, 1994). The ability to select target customers (students) according to academic achievement is a key difference between HE and other public sector institutions (Liu / Dubinsky, 2000), rendering market forces more influential.

The dearth of literature concerning execution of strategy and strategic entrepreneurship in HE means the article crosses a bridge into the private sector in order to inform the development of new findings specific to HE internationalisation.

However, this crossing is not predicated on the mistaken belief that innovation exists

only in the private sector (Zampetakis / Moustakis, 2007) but rather on the existence of Roberts' (1992) concept of public entrepreneurship (implementation of innovation in public sector practice) and on evidence that entrepreneurship can flourish in public sector organisations (Zerbinati / Souitaris, 2005). Drucker's 1985:187 assertion that the promotion of entrepreneurship in public organisations in the West was the "*foremost political task of this generation*" can now be applied to China and CEE. Moreover, Thornberry (2001:530) claims that "*it is the large, slow-moving, bureaucratic organization operating in an increasingly turbulent environment that needs to do the most amount of entrepreneurial soul-searching*" while Kuratko / Goldsby (2004:17) have found entrepreneurship even "*in the most stifling of bureaucratic organisations*".

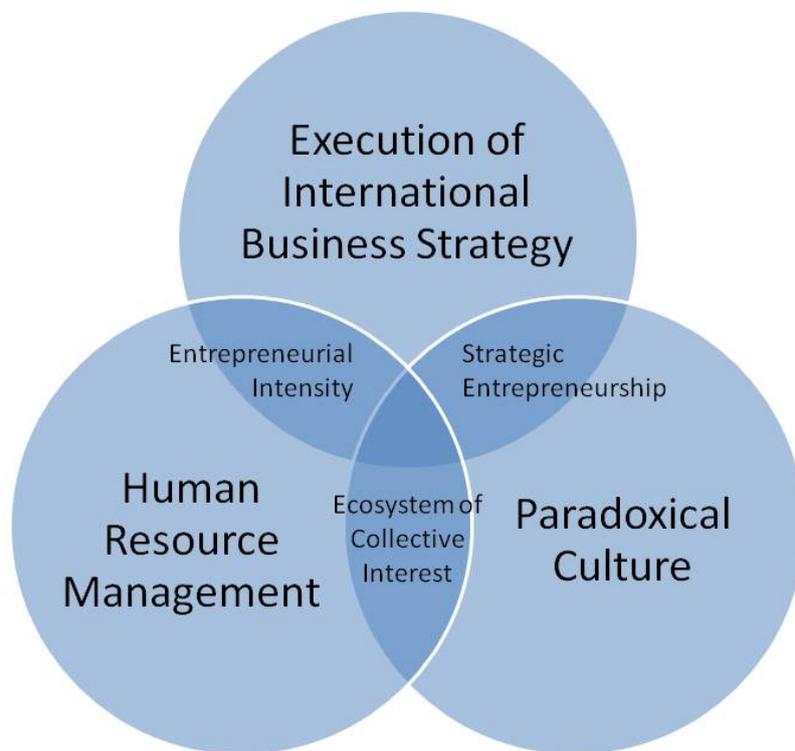
Although influential in this decision to apply private sector theory to semi-public institutions such as a universities, neither public entrepreneurship (Roberts, 1992) nor social entrepreneurship (Benz, 2005) as research topics provide as much insight into strategy execution as strategic and 'strategic entrepreneurship' (Burgelman, 1983b) so they too have been excluded from the scope. The future of Chinese and Eastern European HE appears to lie in an increasingly privatised direction and so this emphasis lends a little future-proofing to the analysis.

## **2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

In order to make an original contribution to theory, construct a foundation for the analysis of findings and draw conclusions, the authors have combined literature and concepts from apparently disparate areas. International business strategy (Section 2.1) is

linked to paradoxical culture (Section 2.2) through the culture and operations of strategic entrepreneurship, a paradoxical concept. This is in turn linked to Human Resource Management by the concept of the ‘eco-system’ or support network and its importance depending on cultural distance. Entrepreneurial intensity as a facet of culture completes the circle back to strategy.

Figure 1: Domains and Concepts in the Theoretical Literature



### ***2.1 On Combining Internationalisation, Strategy Execution & Entrepreneurship***

Further connecting three apparently distinct areas are the assertions that values, attitudes and ethics, clustered by some under ‘culture’, are prominent not only in comprehensive internationalisation strategy but also in entrepreneurial and innovative behaviour (Hayton 2005; Kuratko / Goldsby 2004; Morris/ Jones 1999) and influential in an ability

to execute strategy (Pfeffer/ Sutton 2000) and to internationalise (Bartell 2003). Shepherd et al. (2010) regard organisational culture as an integral part of entrepreneurship. Increasing globalisation enhances entrepreneurial opportunities (Ireland et al. 2001) and international entrepreneurship, or border-crossing innovative behaviour, can create value for organisations (McDougall / Oviatt 2000). The scope of this article precludes general and wide-ranging discussions of the vast areas of strategic management and entrepreneurship, although concepts of strategic management are well-established so that nowadays they are regarded as the threshold of management literacy (Pascale, 1999) and applied to the public sector (Deem, 2001).

Instead, it focuses on entrepreneurship, elements of which have a proven link to strategy execution (Barringer / Bluedorn 1999) and the phenomenon of ‘autonomous strategic behaviour’ (Burgelman 1983a), which has developed in the literature into the concept of the ‘strategic entrepreneur’. In itself, the literature of strategic entrepreneurship is inadequate to investigate how to implement staff exchanges. Ireland (2007:9) describes it as “in its infancy”, and so it is melded with culture theory.

Timmons et al.’s (1985) generic management capabilities of entrepreneurs are quoted by Binks / Lumsdaine (2003:41) and include perseverance, taking initiative and calculated risk-taking and seeking. Stopford / Baden-Fuller (1994) added two ‘bundles of attributes’ of managers and organisations common to all types of entrepreneurship to the three already identified in the literature at that time. The first is ‘pro-activeness’, which they differentiate from highly risky behaviour and characterise as experimental. ‘Aspirations beyond current capabilities’ mean that entrepreneurial managers are not limited by current resources. ‘Team-orientation’ highlights the importance of working together at all levels of the organisation and across boundaries to support innovative

ideas, creative individuals and to build momentum. The ‘capability to resolve dilemmas’ enables apparently impossible challenges to be surmounted while sustained investment in a ‘learning capability’ avoids being mired in fixed patterns of thinking and acting.

The goal of entrepreneurs is to create value by exploiting opportunities. They are willing to fail in order to learn and are persistent and resolute in their pursuit of their dreams (Thornberry, 2001). They can run out of energy and motivation through doing two jobs and “*working 18 hours a day*” (Thornberry 2001: 532), however, since some organisations expect their strategic entrepreneurs to do the day job and then work on an innovation. Strategic entrepreneurs are not upper middle-managers who have played the political game very well and have a lot invested in the status quo (Thornberry, 2001). Autonomous strategic initiatives are more likely to originate with boundary-spanning members of the organisation than with those deeper within the organisation (Hutt & al., 1988).

Burgelman (1983a:223) studied “*the process through which a diversified major firm transforms R&D activities into new businesses*”. Since universities are diversified major organisations, this work can shed light on how “*to diversify into new areas that involve competencies not readily available in the operating system of the (...) corporation*” (ibid.), such as international staff exchange. Diversity in activity or culture can also be regarded as helpful in attracting entrepreneurial individuals into regions and organisations to act as strategic entrepreneurs to execute strategy. Stumpf / Thomas (1999) identify organizational culture as influential on diversity management in groups. Special consideration therefore needs to be given to the cultural context when applying selected staff mobility strategies: the development of an ‘execution culture’ is essential (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006),

## 2.2 *Paradox in national culture and entrepreneurship*

The concept of culture has been thoroughly investigated by world leading scholars (Hofstede 1980; Fang 1999). Using classical Western methodology, Hofstede (1980) conducted one of the earliest and best known cultural studies in management in which he identified four key cultural dimensions amongst different countries. In his milestone research, Hofstede (1983) discovered that national value systems are different among regional clusters of societies. Since Hofstede's (1980) comparative study of national cultures was introduced, the effect of cross-cultural issues has been widely studied in different contexts in international business and management literature (Hofstede/ Bond 1988; Sui/Martin 1992; Thompson/Phua 2005; Bradley/Gao/Sousa 2013). Based on the 'bipolarization of national cultures measured along a continuum', Hofstede's work advocates (1980, 1991) that '*each national culture finds its fixed positioning*' (Faure/Fang 2008:195). However, Wdowiak et al. (2012) found that the cultural capital of the entrepreneur determines performance, irrespective of the country context.

However, the concept of culture is bound with complexity (Fang 2003; Chen 1999). National cultures, instead of sitting at the extreme ends of each cultural dimension, may exist somewhere between the two poles. It is intrinsically 'both/and' rather than 'either/or' (Fang 2006). Beyond the bipolar approach, Fang (1999, 2003, 2008) introduced the concept of yin-yang to measure the national cultures based on dialectical thinking, especially when understanding Chinese culture. A central concept in dialectical thinking is paradox (Fang 2006). Yin-yang represents *a paradoxical, integrated, holistic, harmonious and changing worldview and lifestyle* (Fang 2003: 363). It views the world from a pluralism perspective and suggests that there exists no absolute border line between black and white. In certain circumstances people can

behave both, for example, as individualists and collectivists; long-term and short term; high-context and low-context. Culture is complex, diverse and paradoxical. Situation, context and time are crucial in the study of international cross-cultural management (Fang 2003; Chen 2001).

Confucianism presents an important element in shaping the distinct Chinese national culture, but not exclusively. According to Readding (1990), three philosophical schools, Confucianism (*Rujia*), Taoism (*Daojia*) and Buddhism, working together, affect Chinese beliefs and values, especially Confucianism and Taoism as the two main trends of Chinese thought (Tang 1991). On the one hand, Confucianism suggests that people live in harmony and stresses the importance of cohesion within social groups. Chinese people believe that they belong to groups who look after each other in exchange for loyalty and have a preference for order, structure and formality. In this society, organisations operate functionally and logically (through hierarchy) and power is distributed unequally (power distance). On the other hand, Taoism believes that yin-yang are parents of three creators: heaven, earth and mankind. Dialectical thinking and paradox are the core value of yin-yang philosophical thought. *“Paradoxical values, like Yin and Yang, depend on each other and exist with each other”* (Fang 2008:206). From a yin-yang point of view, people can be collectivists in some situations and but individualists others situations (Fang/ Faure 2011). China has been characterised by fast change and rapid economic growth. Over the last three decades, China’s modernisation has had great impact on Chinese values and their behaviours (Faure/ Fang 2008). While the Chinese endorse many traditional values, such as respect for family and hierarchies, they also have an individuation and creativity orientation. *“Chinese people follow traditional norms and values in some contexts, but behave in a competitive and self-*

*servicing manner in different contexts*” (Leung 2008:186). This paradoxical behaviour pattern has been identified as a unique feature in modern society of China (Fang 2006).

Cultural values, beliefs and norms determine the behaviour of groups and individuals in their interactions within and across systems (Kanagaretnam, Lim/ Lobo 2011). Certain patterns of behaviour, such as work-related values, are integrated with the cultural value system (Meyer 1987; Tang/Millier 1990). In the entrepreneurial literature, it has been noted that entrepreneurs express “*culture and its normative qualities through the values they hold. These values affect their attitudes which, in turn, influence behaviour*” (Bradley/ Gao/Sousa 2013:841). Prior studies illustrate that significant differences exist between nations in entrepreneurial practices. Researchers have found that Chinese entrepreneurs are different from those from other nations. Chu (2000) investigated Chinese family entrepreneurs and concluded that cultural differences are more salient than other factors when investigating the characteristics of Chinese female entrepreneurs. More generally, Holt (1997) compared the characteristics of Chinese and American entrepreneurs, concluding that Chinese entrepreneurs are found to demonstrate individualism, personal achievement and self-determination, as well as openness to change (opposite to the traditional Chinese national collectivism culture). They are comfortable with change and uncertainty and place less value on the power relationship. Considering the uniqueness of the Higher Education industry in China, it is likely that values among Chinese entrepreneurs in private firms are different from in the HE industry.

Compared to private firms, a university is a combination of what seem contradictory forms of organisation, “*partly collegial, partly fragmented, partly professional, partly unitary and partly bureaucratic*” (Grigg 1994:283). Due to this complexity, optimal

strategies are unattainable, according to Groves et al. (1997). For international staff exchange, strategy execution is even more difficult because of the cross-cultural issues. Researchers in the international business field have recognized that assessing cross nation cultural similarities and differences in business approach is critical (Lynch 2009). However, very few explore implementation in the context of international staff exchange in the HE industry within different countries.

### **2.3 *Collective Interest and Work-Family Separation***

Paradoxically, the individualist strategic entrepreneur must set in motion a virtuous circle by convincing people that the innovation s/he wants to pursue is in their own interests (Burgelman/ Hitt 2007:351). It is critical to a venture's success that an 'ecosystem' of interested partners develops a 'collective interest'. The total collective benefit that results from "*leveraging off the self-interest*" of the individual entrepreneur can be substantial even though this collective interest did not form part of the original idea. In fact, the individual entrepreneur might not have been able to foresee the magnitude of this collective benefit. In the case of staff mobility this could include the family of the exchanger.

Most literature problematizes family accompanying expatriates (Richardson, 2006). Richardson / Zikic (2007) suggest that the family might contribute to a positive experience by providing social and emotional support and thereby making the assignment less risky. Their value seems to be closely connected with cultural difference: the greater the distance between the home and host cultures, the more important the role of family as support mechanism.

Many of the academics interviewed by Richardson / McKenna (2003:782) cited “*providing broader life experiences and access to different cultures*” (for their children) as an important driver in their decision to go abroad. “*Parents with dependent children invariably described how they were benefiting enormously from the exposure to different cultures*”. While dependent children influence the choice of location (access to healthcare and safety and the ability to maintain relationships with grandparents were examples given), crucially, it is concluded that

*the findings (...) suggest that managers and recruiters in higher education should be aware that having a family is not necessarily a barrier to taking an overseas appointment. Indeed for some participants it was an incentive to do so [and that] significantly, all of those participants who said that having children is a barrier to expatriation did not have dependent children. (ibid:783)*

Richardson / McKenna (2003) found that relationships with extended family were often influential upon a decision to go abroad. For example, the strength of their children’s relationships with their grandparents at home inhibited some, while the death of a parent provided ‘freedom’ for others.

The organisation costs of work-family separation (Fletcher / Bailyn, 1996:260) therefore require recognition:

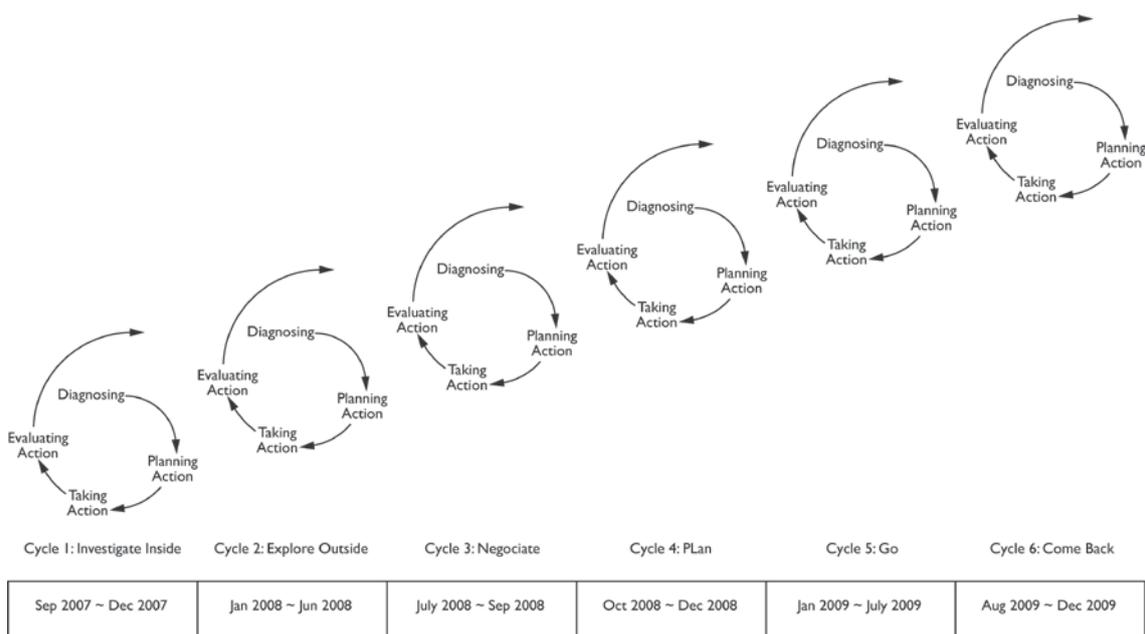
*We argue that not only does a synergistic approach to work and family have the potential to align individual and business concerns in a way that releases new energy and yields mutual benefits; but that when this boundary between work and family is **not** connected, key business goals are likely to be invisibly, but surely, undermined. (...)So, too, in the work-family arena, the zero-sum assumption of separate and adversarial interests creates a similar, but largely unrecognized, set of speed bumps that constrains the ability to innovate work practices and structures.*

### 3 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The design of this research is unique and consists of two phases. Phase One entailed a 28-month insider action research (AR) project in the first, second and third person to implement a staff exchange between two countries within the EHEA. The first person researcher was a middle-ranking female academic with international management responsibilities who was accompanied by her partner and two children in implementing the exchange on behalf of a ‘new’ (post-1992) university in the UK. The second person (the exchange partner) was the same, but unaccompanied, and working on behalf of a ‘traditional’ French university. The research was designed around six ‘Apollonian’ cycles (Heron, 1996) of AR conducted in a systematic manner, chronologically and with approximate durations of three to seven months. The first four cycles actually happened in a more ‘Dyonisian’ way (ibid.), in which taking action was integrated with reflecting in a spontaneous and sometimes expedient way.

**Figure 2: Spiral of Action Research Cycles**

(adaped by the authors from Coghlan/ Brannick 2005:24)



The multiple data generation methods (interviewing, participant observation, journal and document analysis) of the first phase of research were designed to generate “*naturally occurring data*” (i.e. observational) and “*data that are an artefact of a research setting*” (e.g. interview) (Silverman, 2001:286). A single method seemed unlikely to uncover adequate data from a complex project. Data from different sources (e.g. the author’s own experience and that of the exchange counterpart or an interviewee) have been compared as methodological triangulation. Also, suspecting a gap between ‘espoused’ and ‘theory-in-practice’ (Argyris/Schön 1978) data were collected to compare actual experiences with intentions or positions stated in, for example, institutional documents.

One of the authors played the role of ‘participant-as-observer’ (Burgess 1984) who both participates and is open about her role of observer. Working in an academic context meant that the author’s role as researcher was facilitated both in the home organisation and with potential partners. Interviews began as exploratory, unstructured open questions to key stakeholders and developed into more structured events as a review of the relevant literature coupled with the researcher’s own widening experience of the process, started to crystallise the emerging issues in implementation. Interviews were designed either to elicit experience and perception or to elicit feelings and attitudes and sometimes both. More often than not the interviews became “*actively constructed narratives*” (Silverman 2010:191). Formal conversations with colleagues and meetings with potential partners were treated as interviews.

Drawing on the findings from Phase One, Phase Two of the study progressed to Chinese academics experiencing Western teaching and learning as exchangers in the

EHEA system. This phase set out to explore if the entrepreneurial international exchange strategy emerging from Phase One could be applied to Chinese staff mobility through Chinese academic staff's narratives. Following the ethnographic tradition for cross-cultural studies, semi-structured interviews were employed. The sample frame is Chinese academic staff who came to the same UK university as above. The details of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of interview respondents

<i>Interviewees</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Teaching Subjects</i>	<i>Family background</i>	<i>International experience</i>	<i>length of staff exchange</i>
<b>Academic A</b>	Female	English literature	Married One son	Teaching international students at home institution	3 months
<b>Academic B</b>	Female	English literature	Married One girl/ at university	Teaching international students at home institution	3 months
<b>Academic C</b>	Male	Finance and Accounting	Married One child Primary school	Teaching 2+2 students who study 2 years in China and 2 years in the UK university	6 months
<b>Academic D</b>	Male	Logistic and Supply chain Management	Married	Teaching 2+2 students who study 2 years in China and 2 years in UK university	6 months
<b>Academic E</b>	Female	Economic	Married Husband is academic as well One child / 5years	Teaching 2+2 students who study 2 years in China and 2 years in UK university	6 months
<b>Academic F</b>	Female	Business Management	Married One child	Teaching related subjects in English at its own institutions	6 months

The six participants were from different universities in the South of China. These Chinese universities are collaborative partners with the British university. Chinese students study their first 2 years at these Chinese universities in China and joint

the 2nd year in the British university (the well-known 2+2 programme approved by Chinese MoE). As part of the agreement, these Chinese universities send one or two academic staff, who have good English capability, to the British university as the exchangers every year. Amongst these 6 interviewees, 4 of them were female (66%) and 2 male (34%). With respect to their education, 2 respondents had a PhD degree, the rest of them a Master degree. Moreover, the 2 staff from the Normal university had a background in English foreign language studies, the remaining are in Finance and Accounting; Economic, Business Management and Economics. Interviews were conducted in their native language, Mandarin Chinese. On average, the interviews lasted between one and two hours and were recorded.

The AR Cycles from Phase One were split into their component parts and themes were constructed by collecting together similar analyses emerging from a Cycle. Overall conclusions were drawn through a 'Thesis Cycle', a meta-analysis of the AR and its resulting themes. Analysis of Phase Two was conducted by synthesizing all the interview data (Strauss / Corbin 1990). Patterns and themes were identified and coded from each individual interview. Themes were then compared and contrasted across interviews. Finally, the findings of Phase Two were analysed with the results of Phase One in order to reach some comparative conclusions regarding cultural differences and their effect on an implementation approach to staff mobility.

#### **4 FINDINGS**

The research findings generated thick data on international staff mobility in two cases: within the EHEA (Phase One) and between EHEA and China (Phase Two). Academics' experiences related to international staff mobility were diverse. From the first phase, action research within the EHEA, several different themes were identified.

## ***4.1 Phase 1: The Intra-EHEA Perspective***

### *4.1.1 Importance / Influence of Family*

Work and family cannot be kept apart in international exchange. Attempts to protect the family from the emotional ebb and flow of the progress of the intra-EHEA project created huge internal tensions in the exchangers, as they became a buffer between family and employer. The integral part family relationships play in the perceived or actual feasibility and desirability of mobility is evident in the motivations described by previous exchangers (eg to internationalise their children, also observed by Richardson /McKenna (2003)) and in the frequent assumptions made about the ‘problem’ of family in staff mobility (as described by Richardson, 2006). One management assumption is that a family fatally reduces flexibility and mobility. Another is that younger people do not have significant personal relationships and are therefore more mobile and flexible. This leads to management negativity which in turn bolsters the individual’s assumption that the organisation will not support or even tolerate the family. This is a barrier to organisational effectiveness, or a ‘speed bump’ (Fletcher / Bailyn, 1996), constraining the innovation of work practices and stands in stark contrast to the expatriation experience in international commercial businesses.

Throughout the project, one exchanger was acutely conscious to spare the family the ‘emotional roller-coaster’ of the project. Her partner remarked wisely:

*we can’t both afford to live all the ups and downs*

*Author’s Reflective Journal*

so in conversations at home, she glossed over setbacks and leaps of progress alike. However, further into the project, she had no choice but to increase the involvement of her partner, beyond simply passive agreement and caring for their children in her absence. He was already making sacrifices and so she felt it politic to supply a sense of optimistic progress. At the same time, she began to realise that she did not, and would not, know when she could be sure the exchange would proceed and that was what her partner needed to know. The futility of trying to keep work and family separate was clearly demonstrated. Without his support, consent and, increasingly, tolerance, this university initiative could not go ahead, the family lending support as in Richardson / Zikic (2007).

As the arrangements for the exchange progress, personal lives and those outside the organisation are increasingly implicated. The exchanger becomes a buffer between the institutions and their family and they must balance the interests of disparate actors in the exchange. A policy document applied by one university to international staff exchange explicitly excluded any responsibility for or contribution to the family. This explicit exclusion of any responsibility towards the member of staff's family erected an immediate barrier of resource and trepidation. The lack of availability of appropriate health and vehicle insurance meant the exchange was embarked upon without adequate insurance.

*The Business School's focus on organisational issues misses the point: it's the domestic arrangements that will make or break the exchange.*

*Author's Reflexive Journal*

Throughout Cycle 3 and 4, the incidence of institutional disregard for family increased, as did the institution's reliance on the family to implement the plan. Their contribution to the actual move and to the success of the period abroad is paramount. The exchanger's partner drove their belongings abroad and furnished the empty apartment. He and her children formed a family base for her and provided a "way in" to the community. Staff mobility would be enhanced by a readiness on the part of the university to accept, co-operate with and acknowledge their central position to any international assignment. Any potential disadvantages and complexity are outweighed by their potential contribution and so 'work-family separation' (Fletcher / Bailyn, 1996) is counter-productive.

*Fitting in (at work) was the easy bit. The house, the bills, kids settling in, the logistics and crap was the hard stuff, the academic stuff was easy."*

*European Previous Exchanger, collaborator, (interview)*

#### **4.2 Value of the Entrepreneurial Individual**

The value of entrepreneurial individuals was a strong theme. Organisational cynicism is reflected in Pfeffer / Sutton's (2000) concept of 'cognitive closure' and Neilson et al.'s (2008), Sporn's (1996) and Cameron / Freeman's (1991) 'internally-focussed culture'. It requires an entrepreneurial individual to create a new and different culture within and around the project, Burgelman / Hitt's (2007) 'eco-system of collective interest'. Support for the project is lent by individuals with no incentive or reward from the organisation: gaining and maintaining that support is crucial. The tacit

knowledge required to progress an idea resides within individuals and it is passed informally from one individual to another.

*If you want to do an exchange, you're a maverick around here.*

*Previous Exchanger, respondent, (interview), referring to the university*

Staff exchanges must currently be implemented by entrepreneurial individuals, but there is a lot an organisation can do to value those individuals, to facilitate and support them in their endeavours.

This theme grew in depth and breadth in Cycle 2. The fact that only a personal tour of face-to-face meetings yielded any potential partners reflected the strength of a personal network of relationships, how it builds trust and reciprocity, and how that had driven the exchanger to devote the resources to developing it rapidly (Stopford/Baden-Fuller's (1994) 'team orientation'. It can be argued that travelling to meet someone demonstrates an attractive level of commitment and enables one's potential partner to assess an individual, as a potential incomer, and allows them to devote scarce time and energy to your project (the aspirations beyond current capabilities identified by Baden/Stopford-Fuller 1994). There is a limit to how far this could be institutionalised. It was also clear how an institution's external image is predicated on high-profile individuals and their network of relationships. How much easier and more fruitful for a senior academic or manager to organise and effect a worthwhile international exchange than a junior lecturer. This is reflected by Welch (2002) and by research participants:

*Somewhere out there, there's a world of networks and partnerships which are not to do with contracts. That's what fosters reputation as well. The academic world is not built around institutions; it's a personal network of who you know that can only help enhance the institution's reputation – all those intangible things and it's easier and more fruitful for senior people.*

*European Senior Academic, Centre*

In Cycle 3, the possibility of an exchange exists in the minds of entrepreneurs who dedicate their energy and skill to realising it. Overcoming the barriers apparent in the negotiations relies on those individuals – exchangers, Gatekeepers and families - working separately and in concert. demonstrating Timmons et al's (1985) determination and perseverance and Thornberry's (2001) passion and resolution in pursuit of opportunities and dreams. In the absence of policy or precedent, entrepreneurs engage in constructing mutually acceptable agreements, absorbing the extra workload (as implied by Thornberry 2001) and providing the necessary mental and physical flexibility. In Cycle 4, the emphasis of the analysis shifted from valuing the contribution of individual actors in the exchange to avoiding their exploitation. The lack of involvement of the institution in these later stages jeopardises the project, the organisation's reputation and the probability of implementing the strategy.

The turbulent economic environment in late 2008 exacerbated the potential losses from mismatching accommodation income (renting out the family home) and outgoings (renting a new home), preparing the home for rental, paying for accommodation searches, contracts and deposits, travel and temporary accommodation, possibly school fees, cost-of-living disparity and exchange rate fluctuations. These financial pressures leave no margin for error in a 'normal family's' budget and turn the strategic entrepreneur, working to implement their own institution's strategy, into a true entrepreneur, taking the risk for themselves.(as mentioned by Timmons et al, 1985) In

this case, potential rewards for that individual would need to be much higher than simply a well-executed strategy for the organisation.

On top of the financial risks run by the entrepreneurial individual, too many of the fundamental building blocks of project were left to luck, with no contingency in place. The collapse of any one element would result in the total failure of the project. It was not only the privilege of hindsight that crystallized the ‘what ifs’. No solutions to the very real problems of accommodation, for example, were forthcoming from either institution although they would be easily soluble with funding, and so the project continued without contingencies and without ‘anticipatory management’ (Porter / Harper, 2003a): this is a failure of strategic execution. The empathy, co-operation and, ultimately, independent **actions** of experienced individuals – those who appreciated how difficult it is to organise remotely, how useful a little local knowledge can be and how important it is to have some foundations in place before moving – was an important contributor to the ultimate success of the planning phase. They stand in stark contrast to the inaction of the institutions and their representatives.

Both exchange counterparts relied on their close colleagues in the implementation of the exchange, both to flex around their own absence and to welcome and host the incoming counterpart. This can be compared to the discussion of the ‘ecosystem’ of ‘collective self-interest’ (Burgelman/Hitt 2007). This was more successful in the culture of muddling-through and firefighting. Again, the roles of individuals and the efforts they make are crucial to the quality of the exchange experience and the impressions taken back to the home institution.

*He really took me under his wing immediately. I actually taught on his course and he invited me around for Sunday dinner and made Yorkshire puddings and*

*that sort of thing. He really took me under his wing and taught me the ropes. (...) A person like that can really make a difference. But you need to make an effort. Very often people think they can go and live their own lives and sink or swim.*

*European Previous Exchanger, respondent, (interview)*

Initiating, organising and implementing an international exchange as a strategic entrepreneur entailed an ‘emotional rollercoaster’ and significant swings in attitude to the undertaking were experienced. This demonstrates some of Timmons et al’s (1985) general management capabilities of entrepreneurs, specifically total commitment, determination and perseverance and Thornberry’s (2001) description of passion and resolution in pursuit of opportunities and dreams.

### **4.3 The SINO-EHEA Perspective**

#### *4.3.1 Importance / Influence of a Support Network*

Interviewees confirmed the importance of support from home university and family, similarly to within the EHEA, although this was more pronounced in female staff. Again similarly, the importance of a network was underlined, an ‘eco-system of collective interest’ (Burgelman/Hitt 2007), although the Chinese were especially concerned about having a mentor of the same nationality. The importance of support during the cross-culture transition, including institutional support, family support and network support was a strong theme. All participants highlighted how crucial the support from the home university and host are. One participant reflected:

*I was very emotional and positive if I received e-mails from a senior executive and my line managers from our university (the Chinese University). You felt the support there....like I said, support here (in the UK) makes me feel I belong here,*

*I was recognized by British staff..... all these made me willing to work hard and fulfil my duties successfully.*

*Chinese Interview Respondent*

Our findings demonstrate that Chinese exchange staff benefited from their network, especially the academic staff of same nationality in the British University. One participant explained:

*They (the Chinese staff at the British university) shared cultural values with us. Their transferring experiences and leaning journey are important for us. Learning from them is the best way to reduce distress.*

*Chinese Interview Respondent*

It was suggested that assigning a mentor of same nationality (from China) would definitely benefit exchange staff's individual performance and facilitate the implementation of exchange strategy.

All Chinese interviewees had a strong sense of family support. Given the traditional value of family in Chinese society, support such as taking care of elderly people and children are fundamental. The participants discussed the role of gender in influencing the staff mobility overseas. Two female staff expressed their concerns about leaving their children at home. As working mothers, they found it difficult to make the decision to participate in international mobility since it was not realistic to bring the children with them

#### 4.3.2 *The Value of the Entrepreneurial Individual*

From the second phase, the findings of the European-Chinese case show that cultural differences and their impact on teaching and learning are major concerns. Also, playing safe and avoiding ‘breaking the rules of the game’ are fundamental (in contrast to the risk-taking in the first case).

According to the participants, Chinese academic staff generally are not comfortable with change and uncertainty (Hofstede 1980). They attempted to maintain the status quo and expect conformity. The experience of uncertainty was explained clearly in the following:

*I am confident with my subject knowledge, but (I was) very worried about something happened to me without expectations. I am a typical Chinese, I felt threatened by ambiguous.....put myself in the risk situations? No way! I prefer to something predictable when I am in a new organisation (the British University).*

*Chinese Interview Respondent*

As this quote illustrates, a change in working role (exchange staff) often leads to a feeling of ‘separation’ and ‘risks’ for Chinese academic staff, especially in the context of cross-culture transitions. Although the Chinese Ministry of Education encourages and supports Chinese universities in learning from world-famous universities from Western countries, teaching and learning practice, from curriculum design to management of academic standards and quality, remain a big gap between Western and Chinese universities. Creating and implementing new ideas in a new environment were not expected by Chinese academic staff. ‘*Playing safe*’ was the ‘golden rule’ for them. The results also indicate that Chinese academic staff placed different levels of value on the

power relationship due to different organisational cultures and structures. Amongst the interviewees, staff from state-owned universities demonstrated a stronger sense of attaining power and following authority than those staff from private universities in China. Staff from the state-owned universities were more concerned about security. For instance, one male staff member explained:

*I am teaching Logistic and Supply Chain Management in my institution, our university (The Chinese University) is very restrict regarding what to deliver and how to deliver lectures to our students. For example, all lecturers at our institution must bring teaching notes into the lecture rooms. The person we called 'Du Xue' (inspector) will make notes if you do not do so. Creation and innovation were not the expected results.*

*Chinese Interview Respondent*

However, it was found that staff from private universities were less concerned about the 'power' and authority. One staff mentioned:

*Compared to the state-owned university, we are given more freedom when designing and delivering our lectures. The private universities normally respond to changes more quickly than public-universities. We are encouraged to learn new things. For example, if we learn better teaching methods, we can apply them to our teaching system quickly. We get used to the dynamic environment. I found it not so difficult to adjust myself here (in the UK).*

*Chinese Interview Respondent*

#### 4.4 Key Emergent Themes

The key themes emerging from the findings have been summarised in the table below and lead into the implications, and the recommendations drawn from them, in the final section.

Table 2. Key Emergent Themes Comparison

Key themes	Countries	Intra-EHEA	EHEA / China
<b>National culture differences:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncertainty avoidance</li> <li>• Power Distance</li> </ul>		The difference between the EHEA countries in terms of Power Distance (hierarchy) and Uncertainty Avoidance meant the exchange in one was 'top-down' and in the other 'bottom-up'	Traditional Chinese of uncertainty avoidance prevents Chinese academic staff acting as entrepreneurs:  <i>'Play safe'</i> <i>'Not breaking the rules of the game'</i>
<b>Organisational culture differences</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power/ Authority</li> <li>• Autonomy</li> <li>• Differences of teaching and learning systems</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial Intensity</li> </ul>		The difference in entrepreneurial intensity in the European universities reflected differences in national culture and influenced the implementation of the exchange	<b>China</b> A diverse range of universities in China (state-own universities VS. private university) leads to different levels of control of academic staff mobility  <b>UK</b> academic staff at British universities – more autonomy
<b>Different levels of support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional support</li> <li>• Family support (male VS. female)</li> <li>• Network support</li> <li>• Work/Family Separation</li> </ul>		Levels of institutional support for the individual exchanger differed  An eco-system of collective interest around the strategic entrepreneur  Work/family separation is a serious barrier	Support from both sides (UK and China) encourage exchange staff to be more creative and innovative  Family support is crucial, especially for women who need to look after the children  Individual's network ability, especially networking with the academic staff of same nationality.

## 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Tailor your approach to the institutional culture

It is evident that, due to greater cultural similarity within the EHEA, cultural differences present only small obstacles when implementing an exchange strategy. There was, however, a marked difference in entrepreneurial intensity (Barringer/Bluedorn 1999) and risk-taking (an entrepreneurial characteristic (Timmons et al. (1985)) between the European institutions. In one EHEA country, the research was an

entrepreneurial initiative emerging from and driven 'bottom-up' with high levels of entrepreneurial behaviour and ownership. The culture of muddling-through was manifested in project supporters taking responsibility for various elements of a successful exchange.

The response of the 'home' executive team to the exchange proposal focussed on issues of execution and these were notable by their absence in the partner. Here, the response to an initiative born elsewhere and introduced 'top-down' was occasionally one of resentment. The absence of an entrepreneurial attitude and ownership by individuals resulted in many elements continuing to be 'neglected' even when they became crises for the Incomer: 'it was someone else's job'. Levels of hospitality and support for the Incomers were considerably lower abroad than in one country, according to both counterparts, resulting in different experiences and residual impressions of the partnership.

Exchangers from different institutions and different parts of the world do not have the same value systems and do not react to change in an identical manner. This demonstrates that Fang (2008)'s paradoxical behaviour is prevalent in various cultures, not just Chinese. The levels of entrepreneurship required to implement international staff exchange differ according to institution and nation. Identify the 'local' culture and tailor the execution approach accordingly.

## ***5.2 Develop an entrepreneurially-balanced culture***

Leaving everything to the one individual (and their family) concerned in undertaking the exchange entails an unacceptable level of risk for both that individual, others involved and their institutions. The level of financial risk shouldered by the

exchanger (and therefore their dependents) is a high barrier, probably unacceptable to academics on average salaries and impossible for more junior academics on lower salaries. An institution with ambitions to internationalise might prefer to do more to secure successful exchanges and provide Binks / Lumsdaine's (2003) 'demonstration effect'. An over-entrepreneurial project can continue without contingencies and without 'anticipatory management' (Porter / Harper, 2003a): this is a failure of strategic execution.

At the same time, a reliance on bureaucracy means staff are paralysed in the absence of agreed process or paperwork and, when it does not exist, assume there is a good reason and no-one is responsible. People really cannot take responsibility as they have no role in a non-existent process. Similarly, a reliance on planning will not succeed in international staff exchange since the intensely personal nature of a decision to go abroad renders an institutional, strategic plan alone impotent in implementation. Such dilemmas might explain the strongly opposing views regarding the efficacy of planning to execution evident in the literature (eg Mintzberg et al., 1998).

### **5.3 *Abandon 'work/family' separation***

The partner universities involved should consider and take responsibility for some parts of the family's welfare. It was found that at best there was a lack of awareness and ignorance on both sides (home and host) of the fundamental issues arising (financial matters, health, housing and schooling, for example) and at worst, an institutional unwillingness to be involved. The decisions and actions of the employers must be taken in the light of the impact on the family as a whole. Institutions must be prepared to acknowledge the importance of the exchanger's immediate circle and how they can

contribute to the success or failure of such an initiative. While many of the domestic arrangements must necessarily be left to the exchanger and their family, the institution(s) could usefully provide advice, guidance and expertise, information, organising resource and funds. If the burden of organising every part of the exchange on both sides were shared between individual and institution and between institutions it would be more tolerable for all concerned.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

This study suggests that the approach to executing international staff exchange can be influenced or even determined by the degree of the national culture distance involved. A different focus will be required depending on the nationalities involved. Some detailed recommendations can be made.

These findings have important and direct implications for how international staff exchange strategy can be executed. Firstly, this research offers insights into the different roles of individual players (exchange counterparts, family, networks) and their impact on international staff exchange. Hence, it provides valuable guidance not just for individuals but also universities employing them to execute internationalisation.

Secondly, it is clear that organisational culture can significantly affect an individual's behaviour during staff mobility, either becoming a constraint on innovation which limits academic staff's entrepreneurial spirit, or encouraging staff to act as strategic entrepreneurs to implement the staff mobility strategy creatively. Fang's (2008) paradoxical behaviour has been demonstrated in Europeans.

Thirdly, the results of this research demonstrate that a combination of organisational and national culture must be taken into consideration when developing a strategic approach to international staff exchange. Fang's (2008) paradoxical behaviour pattern has been demonstrated in Chinese HE. Indeed, it can be concluded that there is no 'globalised' strategy available to implement staff mobility, nor even a standard approach between institutions. The assumption of self-interest, opportunistic and individualistic behaviour in entrepreneurial context is not universal (Bruton et al. 2008). It can be concluded that an 'intra-European' approach cannot simply be applied to CEE-Chinese staff mobility schemes.

Table 3: Recommendation Summary

<b>Theoretical Concepts</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Implication</b>	<b>Proposition / Recommendation</b>
<b>STRATEGY EXECUTION</b> Entrepreneurial Intensity	Value of individual entrepreneurs Organisational culture differences	Either a reliance on institutional planning or over emphasis on individual entrepreneurial impact will lead to the failure of execution of international staff exchange strategy	Develop and entrepreneurially-balanced culture
<b>HRM</b> Eco-system of Collective Interest Work-family Separation	Importance / influence of the family Importance of a support network	The successful execution of international staff mobility strategy is heavily influenced by good network supports, including both family members and peer staff	Abandon work-family separation
<b>PARADOXICAL CULTURE</b> Strategic Entrepreneurship	Differences between Intra-European and Sino-European cultures	Both national and institutional cultural differences have impact on international staff mobility. However, a paradoxical pattern of culture exists	Tailor your approach to both national and organisational culture

### **6.1 Generalisability or Transferability?**

Denscombe (1998) warns that data generated by action research are unlikely to be representative and cannot be generalised beyond the specific case. “*Universities (...), are so different from one another*” that generalising from one to another is “*troublesome*” (Prichard / Trowler, 2003:.xvii). They suggest three approaches to generalising, a combination of which was used by the authors. Firstly, we have striven to provide sufficiently ‘thick’ description and data (Herr / Anderson, 2005; Waddington, 2004; Prichard / Trowler, 2003) to allow others to evaluate for themselves the applicability of this work to other contexts. Second, generalisation is from theory to practice rather than from a sample to a population. Thirdly, the aim to generalise is rejected altogether and this study claims a value in itself and is instead **transferable**. O’Leary (2005:75) judges the integrity of research in part through applicability outside one’s immediate frame of reference, proposing that “*lessons learned that may be germane to a larger population, a different setting or another group*” demonstrate transferability, rather than generalisability. This is based on Lincoln / Guba’s (1985) notion of transferability, recommended also by Herr / Anderson (2005): that transferability depends on contextual similarity. Greenwood / Levin (2007:62) call this “*transcontextual credibility*” and it is proposed that in this study this is supported by the EHEA context of the research itself and CEE, the Chinese connection and also on the direction of the future development of HE in China and CEE, following Western Europe and American developments. Acknowledging the “*idiosyncratic nature of research contexts*” (O’Leary 2005:75), the article aims at ‘auditability’ as preferable to

reproducibility, and therefore provides the fullest possible explication of the data generation and analysis methods, to make clear how conclusions have been reached.

The participants of the interviews from Chinese universities have been teaching UK-China collaboration joint programmes (e.g. 2+2 dual degree), they are relatively familiar with UK education HE system. However, Chinese academic staff who have not involved in teaching UK-China joint programme may have different views. This action research used the 'self-centric researcher' (O'Leary 2005): quality depends on the credibility of the researcher and the way in which it was conducted and analysed. This limitation is discussed further in Pearce, 2014.

Further research could usefully follow one of two routes: firstly, a quantitative study in China measuring the extent and nature of international staff mobility, comparing that in traditional, state-owned universities with that in the new, privately-owned institutions, which would go on to inform the second, the investigation and development of a range of approaches suitable for Sino-CEE mobility, based on various national and institutional cultures.

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