The public good of higher education:

A lexical-based comparison of the Chinese and Anglo-American approaches

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Contents

Divergences in the public good of higher education

Why do we need a lexical-based comparison?

What is, and how to conduct, a lexical-based comparison of the public good of higher education?

What does a lexical-based comparison tell us about the relevant higher education practices and phenomena?

The public good of higher education

- A lack of clarity about what the public good of higher education means;

- Shaped by political and educational cultures:
  - E.g., the state's responsibilities and boundaries, state-university relations, individualism, the collective good (Calhoun, 2006; Cheng & Yang, 2015);

- The dominance of the Anglo-American state/society/university assemblages
  - E.g., Samuelson's (1954) formula of public/private goods.

Why?: Language as a major carrier of culture

- Language is a part of culture and a major carrier of culture (Brown, 1994).

- The same concept in different languages: various meanings & underpinning cultural and philosophical ideas.

- Language to generate major dilemmas in comparative studies and mutual understanding.

- The dominance of the English language in academia & the Western hegemony of knowledge

Why?: The Western dominance of discourses in higher education

- Worldwide passion for imitating Western higher education practices.

- The Hellenic-Judeo-Christian heritage of Europe and the European settler states.

- The existence of diversity.

- Possible negative outcomes:
  - ❑ Narrowing 'the imaginary of universities and human relationships in general, limiting the possibilities of knowledge and being' (Shahjahan et al., 2017, p. S52)
  - ❑ Privileging Western knowledge over the other;

Why?: Language challenges

- The use of the English language as a global academic language (Flowerdew & Li, 2009).

- Cultural baggage carried by concepts.

- Tendency of use English (or more broadly Western) concepts and thoughts as a universal lens to explain higher education phenomena.

- A lack of discussion about non-Western concepts in the global higher education literature (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p.15; Yang, forthcoming).

- Change of connotations and denotative

A lexical-based comparison

- To engage with the contextual and cultural settings of the languages.

- To identify and develop concepts based on its own knowledges and cultures;

- To reveal cultural baggage and nuances of concepts;

- To establish bridges connecting contextual-specific concepts

Comparing key concepts of the public good of higher education in Chinese and English

Step I

Identifying relevant key contextual-based concepts in both Chinese and English

Step II

Examining the identified key concepts in each language/context and interpret them in the other language

Step III

Discussing the issue of 'fit'and the degree of overlap

Step I: identifying key relevant concepts

- Relevant Chinese key concepts:

  ❑ 公（*gong,* public），私（*si,* private），国家（*guojia*, state），天下（*tianxia*, all under heaven, world）

- Relevant Engish key concepts:

  ❑ Public, private, common, public goods, private goods, common

Step II: examining the key concepts in each language/context (Chinese 公 and 私)

- 公（public），私（public）

  ❑ Physical objects (before the Spring and Autumn period, 770-476 BCE)

    '薄污我私，薄澣我衣。' ——《诗经》

  'I will wash my private clothes clean, and I will rinse my robes.'–The Book of Songs

  ❑ Abstract and metaphysical meanings (after the Spring and Autumn period)

    '志忍私，然后能公。'——《荀子·儒效》

    'Only those who can restrain their private wills could serve the public.'–Xunzi, Ruxiao

Step II: examining the key concepts in each language/context (Chinese 公 and 私)

-A normative preference for 公（*gong*) over 私（*si*)

程颐(1033-1107)：'义与利，只是个公与私。'——《河南程氏遗书》

'*Righteousness and interests, are merely public and private.*'–Henan Cheng's Writings

朱熹(1130-1200)：'己者，人欲之私也；礼者，天理之公也。'——《论语或问》

'*what a person seeks for is his own epitomizes selfish desire [si]; what rite requires represents the justice [gong] of heavenly principles.*'–Questions and Answers on the Analects

Step II: examining the key concepts in each language/context (Chinese 天下)

- 天下 (*tianxia*) : all under heaven
  - The world & The highest supernatural force
  - 天下为公 (*tianxia weigong*) : all under heaven belongs to all and is for all
  - No other

'**乃命羲和**, 钦若昊天．历象日月星辰．敬授民时。'——《**尚书·虞书·**尧典》

'*Xi and He were ordered to strictly follow heaven, calculate the rule of the sun, moon and starts, formulate a calendar, and inform people of the time and seasons.*' –The Book of History

Step II: examining the key concepts in each language/context (Chinese 国家)

- 国家（*guojia*）: state
  - The family state
  - The civilizational state (Jacques, 2012; King, 2018; Zhang, 2012)

'人有恒言，皆曰"天下国家"。天下之本在国，国之本在家。' ——《孟子·离娄上》

'*People often mention the following three together: all under heaven, the state, and the family. The root of all under heaven is in the state. The root of a state is in the family.' Mencius*

Step II: examining the key concepts in each language/context (English public/private/common)

- **The public/private dualism**
  - Government *vs.* non-government
  - Non-market *vs. market*
  - A capitalist society: society is consisted of market and non-market
  - Public goods: non-excludability and/or non-rivalry (公共利益，公共物品)
- **The inclusive communicative public**
  - Public as a universal and inclusive social space
  - The emphasis on liberty, especially freedom of thought and expression & inclusive and grassroots democracy

Step III: the issue of 'fit' and the degree of overlap

- Imbalance in knowledge flows

- Differences despite large overlaps

- Concepts carry cultural baggage

- No equivalence of concepts, but approximations

- Lost of meanings after translation

Step III: the issue of 'fit' and the degree of overlap
(From Chinese concepts to Anglo-American lexicon)

Concept in Chinese	Equivalent, approximation or nearest overlap in Anglo-American thought	Discussion of issues of 'fit' and degree of overlap
公 Gong	• Public; common. • Justice; for all's benefits; altruism and selfless spirit; openly; equally divided. • State; social; international; official. • Male; Duke.	There are no explicit explanations of gong in Chinese, similar to 'public' in English. It has different meanings in varied situations. Need to discuss based on contexts.
私 Si	• Private; selfish; secret; personal.	There are no explicit explanations of '公' in Chinese, similar to 'public' in English. It has different meanings in varied situations. Need to discuss based on contexts.
天下 Tianxia	• All under heaven; everything on earth (including human beings, living creatures, natural resources…); a Chinese way of viewing the world. • * All under heaven belongs to/is for all (tianxia weigong): people's pursuit of universal love, which includes fairness between others and oneself, so that people are able to overlook specific differences in reality and seek an ideational and abstract equality.	'All under heaven' is the direct translation from Chinese. The English overlap is an explanation of the original Chinese term. Thus a high degree of overlap.

Step III: the issue of 'fit' and the degree of overlap
(From Anglo-American concepts to Chinese lexicon)

Anglo-American concept	Equivalent, approximation or nearest overlap in Chinese thought	Discussion of issues of 'fit' and degree of overlap
Public	• 公，公众，公开； 公共的，公众的，政府的，非市场的，公用的，公开的	Large overlaps of connotations. The Chinese interpretations can effectively explain the English terms. However, new Chinese ideas may be added to the English terms that are not included in the original terms. For example, 'secretly' and 'selfishness' may be added to the term of 'private'.
Private	• 私，私人，私下； 私人的，私立的，个人的，秘密的，自私的	
Public goods	• 公共利益；公共物品；国有利益/物品	The connotation of the Chinese translations is narrower that only refers to
Private	私人利益，私人物品，商业产品和服务	economic and political

Implications for exploring and comparing the relevant higher education practices and phenomena

1. The varied attitudes towards the relationship between 公/私 and public/private suggest distinct expectations of higher education's outcomes.

2. The Chinese idea of having a comprehensive state *vis-à-vis* the Anglo-American idea of having a limited liberal state indicate different approaches to the organisation of higher education.

3. The worldview manifested in the Chinese idea of 天下 reflects an alternative way to discuss cross-border higher education activities to the Anglo-American way based on methodological nationalism.

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