Enduring hardships with global knowledge asymmetries: A national scenario of China's English-language academic journals in the humanities and social sciences

Abstract   Since the 2000s, China has been fast establishing English-language academic journals to further internationalize research. This article delineates a national scenario of such journals in the humanities and social sciences (HSS) and explores their efforts and predicaments in bringing China's HSS research to the world. Based on first-hand data collected empirically through interviews and documents, it shows that HSS English-language journals in China attempt to challenge yet are conditioned at the same time by the imbalanced international knowledge structure. While still at a preliminary stage of development in terms of quantity and quality, the journals have already been confronted with major challenges including English language hurdles, unfavorable position in research evaluation systems, unfamiliarity with standards of international academic writing and publishing, and tensions between international ambition and local commitment. This article argues that HSS journals in non-Western societies including China need to strike a balance between their contemporary bid for international visibility and long-term contribution to multiple perspectives in global HSS research.

Introduction

The globe is fast shrinking into a village. Yet, the scholarly world remains greatly divided into a few centers and many peripheries (Heilbron 2014). The direction of knowledge flow continues to be predominantly from the metropole to the periphery, especially in the humanities and social sciences (HSS). Nevertheless, increasingly deterritorialized global flows (Appadurai 1996) are opening up possibilities toward pluralization of research capacity (Marginson 2010). Theories about and strategies against hegemonic HSS (Kuhn and Yazawa 2013) are receiving increasing attention in the international academia. In contrast, empirical studies on attempts by peripheral societies to counter the unidirectional knowledge dissemination have been much lacking.

Like those in many non-Western societies, HSS as modern disciplines in China are a foreign transplant. The emphasis of China's HSS development has long been to import theories, methods, academic systems, and practices from the West. China's achievements in higher education during the past few decades are marked by rapidly rising 'hard' disciplines (science, technology, and medicine, abbreviated as STM) and much less visible 'soft' disciplines (HSS). For example, in 2019 Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), 17 Mainland Chinese universities are ranked among top 200 in mathematics, 33 in computer science and engineering, but only 7 in economics, one in political sciences, and no Mainland Chinese universities is ranked in top 200 in law, sociology, psychology, and communication (ARWU 2019).

Against such a backdrop, the government has realized the importance of improving the international influence of China's HSS. There is a shift from mere 'bringing in' to including 'going out' in the policy discourse of HSS development in Mainland China (Wang 2014; Feng et al. 2013). Developing English-language academic journals is designated as China's active initiative for its HSS to go global. The journals are established as a platform to move from one-direction import to reciprocal dialogue in scholarly communication between China and the world. While they attempt to challenge the imbalanced international knowledge structure, they are also much restricted by it. As a relatively recent development, these journals have rarely been researched empirically. This article for the first time depicts an overall picture of Mainland China's HSS English-language journals[1], and explores how the journals are developed to contribute to global HSS research and move beyond asymmetries in worldwide knowledge flows.

Theoretical framework

The broader literature on unequal international scholarly relations provide valuable conceptual perspectives in understanding disadvantages of HSS development in non-Western societies. Influenced by dependency theories and Marxist view of imperialism and colonialism, researchers have identified a center-periphery structure (Altbach, 1987; 1998) and global intellectual hegemony (Gosovic 2000) in the international knowledge system, where countries in the center provide teaching and means of creation while peripheral nations provide learning and validation (Galtung 1971).

[1] Hereinafter in this article, 'China' is used to refer to 'Mainland China' for short. Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan are not included for discussion because their academic systems are different from that of Mainland China.

Structural disadvantages for non-Western HSS development include the dominance of English in the international academia (Lillis and Curry 2010), and the concentration of leading scholars and institutions, means of knowledge dissemination as demonstrated by international journals, databases and publishers in Western countries (Altbach 1998). Bibliometric analysis shows that journals, the most cited regions, and inter-regional research collaboration in Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI) are dominated by Europe and North America (Gingras and Mosbah-Natanso 2010; Frenken et al. 2010), and the diversification of authorship in terms of affiliated countries of SSCI indexed journals largely lags behind journals indexed in Science Citation Index (SCI) (Dyachenko 2014).

The uneven knowledge structure in global HSS is not only maintained through institutional components, but also through less visible aspects in ideas, theories, concepts, and values. Drawing on postcolonial and critical theories, researchers have started to question the historical and continuing dominance of one particular civilizational source of knowledge (the Western) over others since the 1960s (Alatas 2006). Major social theories based on European and North American experiences claim to produce universally applicable statements, concepts, and theories (Keim 2010). Discourses of Orientalism (Said 1978) and self-Orientalizing discourses in non-Western societies form a 'conspiracy' (Kuwayama 2004) in constructing a binary between the advanced West and the 'other'. Social thinking in non-Western societies are readily marginalized, as materials to learn about rather than sources of concepts to learn from (Connell 2007). Non-Western HSS researchers largely depend on Western scholarship for ideas, theories, and methods (Alatas 2003).

However, in an era of globalization, 'complex, overlapping, disjunctive' global flows of people, information, and ideas provoke dynamics and agency for HSS scholars to construct new 'imaginary landscapes' (Appadurai 1996, p.31-32) that emphasize decolonization of research and multiplicities in understandings. Calls for alternative discourses to 'Euroamerican-oriented models, research agendas, and priorities' (Alatas 2000, p.1) are re-emerging. The term 'alternative' does not mean to replace Western knowledge with indigenous non-Western concepts. Instead, it suggests that there is a need 'for taking seriously non-Western sources of ideas and concepts in the social sciences, and for considering a more critical assimilation of Western theories and concepts' (Alatas 2006, p.16). Strategies for developing alternative discourses in non-Western societies are discussed. For example, Shin (2013) proposes 'double indigenization', which means 'theoretical reflection through re-contextualizing Western social theories in the West and contextualizing local social theories in the non-West' (p.78). Similarly, Geerlings and Lundberg (2018) summarize two tasks: encouraging discussions on

power/knowledge in order to change power relations and reactivation of subjugated local knowledges.

Postcolonial and critical scholars have also examined examples of internationally recognized alternative discourses in non-Western societies, such as southern theory (Connell 2007) and Asia as method (Chen 2010). Nevertheless, such voices are still thin in global HSS arena. Few empirical studies have been conducted on collective attempts or efforts in non-Western societies to challenge Western hegemony, develop alternative HSS and improve its international visibility. Questions remain unknown regarding if and how such attempts are possible in practice. This article contributes to filling the gap through investigating into such an attempt--- HSS English-language journals in China.

The journals intend to challenge the hierarchical global knowledge structure through providing a platform for introducing China's research to the outside world and facilitating multiple perspectives especially perspectives from peripheral societies in HSS research. To better achieve this, the journals need to improve their international impact. It should be noted that this article does not aim to measure the international impact of China's English-language journals, though conventional metrics for measuring journals such as impact factor, indexing and ranking in international citation indices are used to provide some ideas on current situation of the journals. The focus is to explore how HSS English-language journals in China are developed to bring China's research to the world and cope with Euro-American hegemony in global HSS.

Drawing upon the literature on hierarchical international knowledge structure, and postcolonial and critical perspectives on Western hegemony in HSS knowledge production and strategies against it, specific research questions of this article ask: 1) what efforts have the journals made to introduce HSS research by Chinese researchers to the outside world and rethink Euro-American hegemony in global HSS? 2) What have been done to enhance their international visibility? 3) What predicaments are they facing in a context of hierarchical global knowledges?

Currently there are many more STM English-language journals than HSS ones in China (Xu et al. 2019). Empirical studies on China's STM English-language journals are helpful in indicating which aspects of an English-language academic journal in China need attention (e.g. Zhang et al. 2019; Lin and Zhan 2016). Based on their actual experience and observation, some journal editors or initiators have discussed about the current situation of China's HSS English-language journals including policy context, different approaches to internationalization, and challenges they face such as language barriers (Xu et al. 2019; Li and Lv 2015; Xu 2014). However, few empirical studies have been done on these journals. Therefore, a national picture

of China's HSS English-language journals will be presented before discussing findings of the research questions after the methodology section.

Data and method

The number of China's learned journals has been changing. By the end of 2018, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS 2018) and Li & Lv (2015) have produced the most comprehensive calculation of HSS English-language journals in China. All the listed periodicals and other journals found on the internet were checked one by one using Scopus, Google, Web of Science, Baidu, the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), and the database of the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of China (SAPPRFT), and a final list of 80 HSS English-language journals was compiled. These journals are hosted by four types of organization: universities, CASS and the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), publishers, and governmental or quasi-governmental organizations. Centered on academic performance, this study focuses mainly on journals that are not hosted by governmental organizations. Covering policy reports, political commentaries, newsletters and research papers, journals managed by government or quasi-government organizations are more like comprehensive magazines than academic journals, such as *Qiushi Journal* managed by Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Accordingly, 14 journals were excluded and with 66 journals remaining.

This article seeks to portray a national scenario of such journals. A qualitative approach was employed to understand their operation, including the experiences and perceptions of their editors. Fieldwork was conducted during April 2017 and October 2018[2]. Two sources of data were collected: interview responses and documents. Purposive and snowball sampling (Manson 2002) was used to identify and approach interview participants: editors-in-chief/editors/associate editors/managing editors of each journal, who are in charge of journal development and many of whom are senior scholars in China within their fields. Eventually, 32 participants from 27 journals (41% of the total 66) were interviewed (Table 1). Semi-structured interviews were employed to allow participants to express their thoughts or feelings freely about the aims, meanings, operation, achievements, and challenges of their journals. The length of each

[2] This article addresses China's HSS English-language journals launched in or before October 2018. After fieldwork, some new journals were established such as *Beijing International Review of Education* managed by Beijing Normal University. They are not included in this study.

interview ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours, with the average length being 50-60 minutes. In addition, detailed information (including journal information and contents, policy documents, and other relevant materials) on all the 66 journals was collected, especially those could not be accessed through interviews.

Thematic analysis (Guest et al. 2012) was conducted on all the interview transcripts and documents collected. First, a set of topical codes (Richards 2009) was produced based on the research questions. Second, within each topical code (or research question), themes were identified both inductively from the raw data and deductively inspired by the literature on international knowledge structure and postcolonial perspectives on HSS knowledge production. The data were read and re-read in order to reach an accurate and holistic understanding of them.

Table 1 Personal and institutional details of interviewees

Interviewee	Gender	Subject area of the journal	Editorial position	Highest academic degree	Professional rank
J1a	F	Education	Book review editor	Ph.D. overseas	Associate professor
J1b	F	Education	Managing editor	Ph.D. domestic	N/A
J1c	M	Education	Editor-in-chief	Honorary doctorate overseas	Professor
J2	F	Law	Managing editor	No information available (NIA)	N/A
J3	F	Literature and literary theory	Managing editor	NIA	N/A
J4a	F	Philosophy	Managing editor	NIA	N/A
J4b	M	Philosophy	Associate editor-in-chief	Ph.D. domestic	Professor
J5	M	History	Editor-in-chief	Ph.D. overseas	Professor
J6a	M	Education	Coordinating editor	Ph.D. domestic	Professor
J6b	F	Education	Editor-in-chief	Ph.D. domestic	Professor
J7	F	Economics and management	Managing editor	Ph.D. domestic	Associate professor
J8	M	Social sciences (miscellaneous)	Executive editorial director	Ph.D. domestic	Associate research fellow
J9	M	Economics	Managing editor	Ph.D. domestic	Associate research fellow
J10	M	History	Associate editor-in-chief	Ph.D. domestic	Professor
J11	M	Economics and finance	Executive editorial director	Ph.D. domestic	Associate professor
J12	F	History	Associate editor	Ph.D. overseas	Associate research fellow

J13	M	Religious studies	Associate editor-in-chief	Ph.D. domestic	Professor
J14	F	Archeology	Head of editorial department	NIA	N/A
J15	F	Social sciences (miscellaneous)	Assistant editor	NIA	N/A
J16	F	Economics	Editorial staff	NIA	N/A
J17a	M	Social sciences (miscellaneous)	Managing editor	NIA	N/A
J17b	M	Social sciences (miscellaneous)	Associate senior editor	Ph.D. domestic	Associate research fellow
J18	M	Business and management	Executive editor-in-chief	Ph.D. overseas	Professor
J19a	F	Sociology	Editor	Ph.D. overseas	Assistant research fellow
J19b	M	Sociology	Managing editor	Ph.D. overseas	Senior research fellow
J20	M	Economics	Executive editorial director	Ph.D. domestic	Senior research fellow
J21	M	Economics	Editorial coordinator	Ph.D. domestic	Professor
J22	M	Humanities (miscellaneous)	Assistant editor	Ph.D. domestic	Assistant professor
J23	M	Environmental science	Executive director	Ph.D. domestic	Professor
J24	M	Law	Editor	Ph.D. domestic	Associate professor
J25	M	International relations	Editor-in-chief	Ph.D. domestic	Professor
J26	F	Media studies	Editor-in-chief	Ph.D. overseas	Professor
J27	F	Education	Associate editor	Ph.D. overseas	Professor

Findings

Findings of this study depict an overall picture of China's HSS English-language journals, and reveal the efforts journals have made in coping with global knowledge asymmetries, as well as the challenges they face.

A national picture of the journals

Political rationales have been the strongest push for HSS English-language journals to emerge in China. The earliest journal is the *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics* established in 1978, and the latest one this article addresses is the *Bamboo and Silk* launched in 2018. Most of the journals were established in recent one or two decades. Among the total of 66, 60 (91%) were

launched in or after 2000, 52 (79%) started in or after 2006, and 34 (52%) were established in or after 2010. Many journals directly or indirectly were resulted from top-down HSS 'going-out' policy aiming at global status and soft power enhancement (J1b, J10, J19b, J20, J24). For example, *Frontiers in China* journal series (consisting of 27 journals, among which 7 are in HSS) were initiated in 2006 by the Ministry of Education jointly with the Higher Education Press. The 'Chinese Academic Research Translation Project' managed by National Office of Philosophy and Social Sciences has been funding 10 journals since 2010, including *China Economist*, *Social Sciences in China*, *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, and 7 HSS journals of the *Frontiers in China* series, with around RMB 50,000 (now increased to RMB 100,000) for each issue.

Despite being influenced by the policy discourses, according to the interviewees, the journals enjoy a considerable extent of freedom in operation. As an editor expressed, "on one hand, our journal is guided by government policies. On the other hand, academic research, academic publishing, and academic community have great autonomy in self-development and self-adjustment" (J1b). A practical reason for such autonomy is their use of English as "a buffer zone from censorship" (J5). Another editor echoed that "currently there is much less censorship on English-language journals compared with those Chinese ones" (J17b). The journals are predominantly operated based on academic criteria.

On the whole, the journals are still at their preliminary stage of development. In comparison with a total over 2000 HSS Chinese-language journals (CNKI 2017), the number of HSS English-language journals is dwarfed. The scale of English-language journals is far from representing China's prosperous academic developments in HSS (J12). Of the journals 37 (56%) have 'China' or 'Chinese' in their journal titles, and 50 (76%) explicitly regard issues or topics related to China as one/the research focus in their 'aims and scope'. They cover different subject areas, including economics, finance, business, and management (17), law (8), education (4) and so on, as shown in Figure 1. As for their geographic distribution, most journals' editorial offices are based in Beijing (36, 55%) and Shanghai (9, 14%), where many top Chinese universities and academic organizations are located (Figure 2).
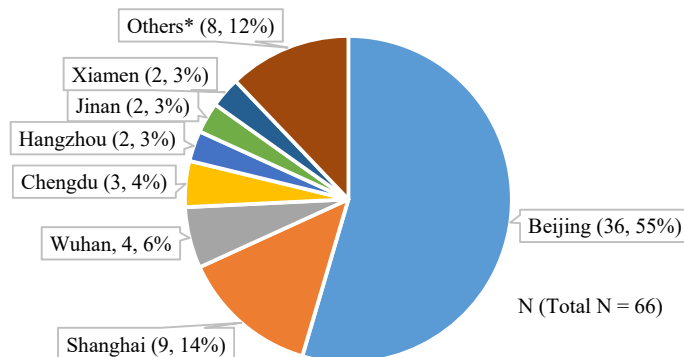
Figure 1   Disciplinary distribution of China's HSS English-language journals

N (Total N = 66)
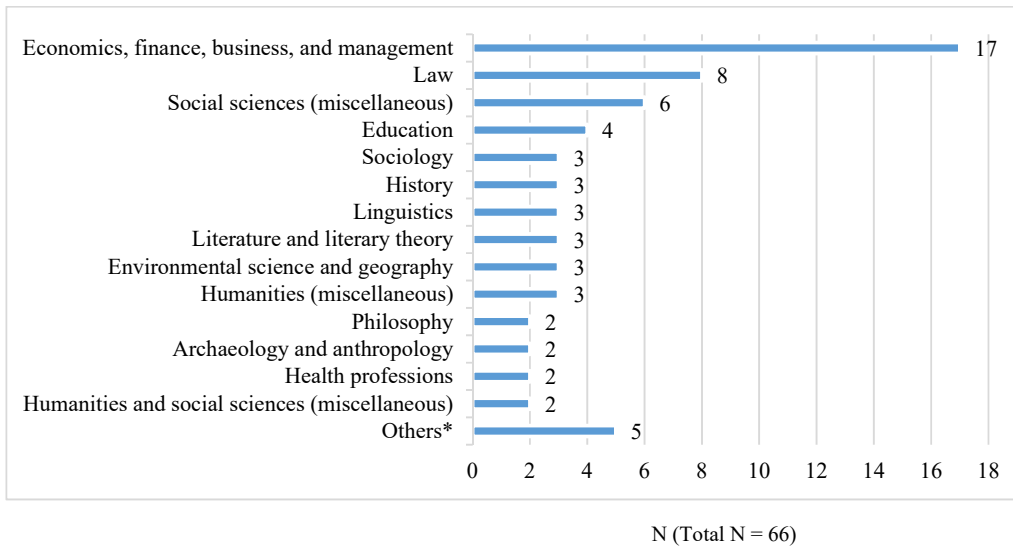
* With one journal each in international relations, media studies, religious studies, dance research, and library and information sciences respectively

Figure 2 Geographic distribution (location of editorial office) of China's HSS English-language journals

* With one journal's editorial office based in Tianjin, Guangzhou, Xi'an, Suzhou, Changchun, Changsha, Nanchang, and Zigong respectively

While most journals have established an international editorial board with members from different countries and regions, about 14 journals have their editorial boards consisting of all Chinese members. 47 (71%) journals cooperate with international publishers. Currently Taylor & Francis Group, Brill, and Springer are the three major international partners for the journals, as illustrated in Figure 3. Usually the Chinese editorial department is responsible for contents and the international publisher is in charge of sales and distribution outside China.

By far, only six journals are indexed in SSCI and none in A&HCI, as indicated in Table 2. Apart from the six SSCI-indexed journals, several other journals have also gained relatively

substantial international impact, with growing downloads, citations, and attention. For example, *Frontiers of Education in China* is included in international citation indices such as Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI), and some articles it has published have won international awards, such as Best Article Award for Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Higher Education SIG in 2013. Several editors mentioned that their journals were listed as a reference in university graduate courses in North America, and were known among international scholars (J3, J5, J14).

Nevertheless, the international impact of most journals is generally very limited. 13 out of the 66 journals are not abstracted or indexed in any international citation indices, including those inclusive (rather than selective) databases such as WorldCat, EBSCO, Scopus, Google Scholar. This means the 13 journals can hardly be accessed by international readers. Only 27 (41%) journals are indexed in Scopus, the largest international citation database of peer-reviewed journals. In 2018, three journals were ranked in Q1 in their respective areas in Scimago Journal Rank based on Scopus data, while 11 were ranked in Q2, three in Q3, and 10 in Q4, as shown in Figure 4. A number of journals are quite 'young' such as *Journal of Chinese Sociology* launched in 2014. Given more time, they might achieve better international visibility. Yet, some journals were established relatively early but their international impact has barely improved, such as *Journal of Ancient Civilizations* launched in 1986.

Figure 3 International publishers partnering with China's HSS English-language journals


N (Total N = 66)
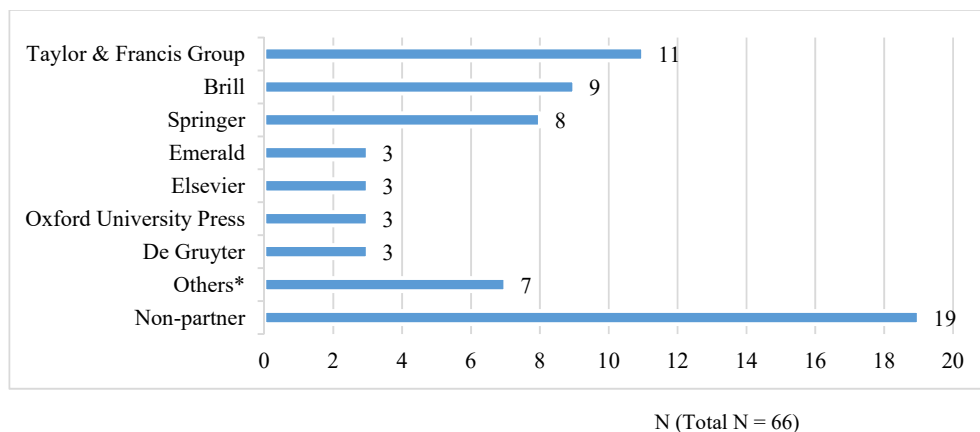
* With two journals partnering with SAGE, and one journal each partnering with Wiley, Pluto Journals, Knowledge Hub Publishing, Cambridge University Press, and World Scientific Publishing respectively

Table 2 SSCI-indexed HSS English-language journals in China

Launch year	Journal	Organizer(s)	Publisher(s)
1993	*China & World Economy*	Institute of World Economics and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS)	Wiley; Institute of World Economics and Politics, CASS
2000	*Annals of Economics and Finance*	Central University of Finance and Economics; Peking University; Wuhan University	Peking University Press
2002	*Chinese Journal of International Law*	Institute of International Law, Wuhan University	Oxford University Press
2006	*Chinese Journal of International Politics*	Institute of International Relations, Tsinghua University	Oxford University Press
2008	*China Agricultural Economic Review*	College of Economics and Management, China Agricultural University	Emerald
2012	*Journal of Sport and Health Science*	Shanghai University of Sport	Elsevier; Shanghai University of Sport

Figure 4 Indexing and ranking situation in Scimago Journal Rank

N (Total N = 66)
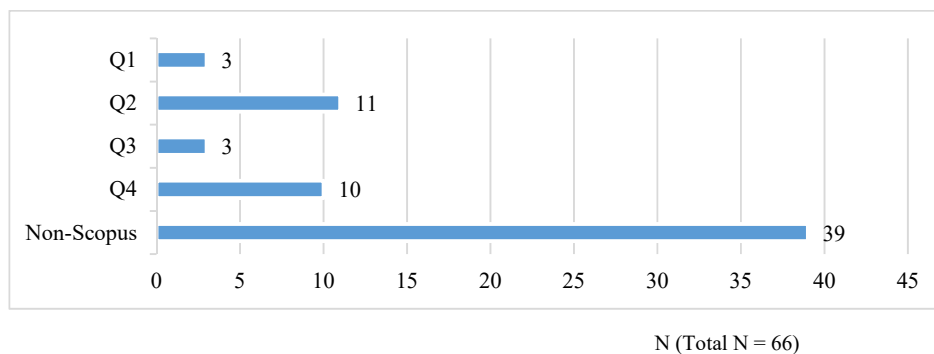
Efforts in coping with global knowledge asymmetries

Despite of their limited international visibility, HSS English-language journals in China provide a platform for bringing China's research to the world and facilitating multiple perspectives and pluralistic epistemologies in HSS research.

A bridge for reciprocal communication and an act towards alternative discourses

When asked about purposes of establishing HSS English-language journals in China, almost all the interviewees mentioned "introducing China's research outputs to the outside world". Participants pointed out a lack of understanding of the global south and misunderstandings about China and China studies (J1c, J6a, J8, J9, J13, J14, J18, J20, J21) in the international academia. China's HSS English-language journals therefore aim to be a "bridge" (J1b, J4b, J14, J18) for "reciprocal/multidirectional communication" (J12), "mutual understandings" (J1c), and "equal dialogue" (J13), so as to "transform the unidirectional knowledge dissemination from center to periphery" (J20). Some editors problematized the uneven structure in global HSS research (J1b, J1c, J8, J9, J10, J15, J18, J19a, J20, J24, J27), Eurocentrism and American universalism in epistemology of research (J12, J13, J18, J20), and expressed their understandings of these journals as a platform for multiple perspectives and alternative discourses, as remarked by two overseas returnees:

> Internationally, American research is regarded as the standard in management studies. Chinese researchers orient themselves to international journals in order to get published, address issues interesting to those journals and follow their discourses. So very often we can see English articles about China's problems, such as copyright issues, environmental dumping, and so on. A China's English-language journal provides a platform for addressing local issues and engaging in dialogue with the international at the same time. (J18)
>
> When you publish in an international journal, if you tell a Chinese story, often you need to justify "why does an American or a Westerner need to know about it". Although more and more Chinese scholars publish internationally, it's worth pondering what kind of articles, concerning what issues, from what perspectives, and following what paradigms, could get published. Our journal is more comprehensive and diversified. What we really care about is whether an article addresses real problems in Chinese education, whether its interpretations grasp local contexts, and what comparative horizon or perspectives it can provide. (J27)

The journals encourage theoretical discussions on Chinese, Asian, or non-Western issues, reforms, history, traditions… from various especially indigenous perspectives, and explore their possibilities in contributing to theory building (J1a, J21). For instance, in their 'aims and scope', the SSCI indexed journal *China & World Economy* positions itself as "a truly international

journal that provides a unique Chinese perspective on international issues in economics that are related to China"; *Frontiers of Education in China* "aims to connect Chinese and international perspectives, and create a platform for a deepening understanding of the global significance of Chinese education". They are introducing Chinese scholarship to the outside world in various forms in addition to research papers, such as review articles about China's research on a certain topic (J24), comprehensive introduction to leading Chinese researchers (J10), interviews with most influential Chinese scholars on a chosen topic (J12), and book reviews (J1a).

A number of editors reported that they consciously had their priorities for manuscripts re-contextualizing and rethinking existing topics, concepts, and paradigms (J1b, J12, J20). One editor emphasized the meaning of their journal as a platform to facilitate "true internationalism characterized by a less hierarchical network" (J12). She, echoed by several other participants, pointed out that readers and authors of their journals include scholars from other non-Anglophone countries, such as Japan, Brazil, South Africa, South East Asian countries (J8, J9, J12, J19a, J20).

Strategic dependence on international resources to improve visibility of the journals

The few journals that have achieved relatively higher global impact have demonstrated possibilities in strategic dependence on international resources to enhance visibility. Relying on returnees trained in Anglo-American centers, journals hosted by top Chinese universities are privileged to build connections with the center. For example, the *Chinese Journal of International Politics* launched in 2006 has benefited much from its former editor-in-chief Yan Xuetong and his international academic connections. Holding a PhD from University of California, Berkeley, Yan is professor and dean of Tsinghua University's Institute of Modern International Relations. He and other members of the editorial team have spent substantial efforts in the journal. Through continuously inviting internationally renowned scholars to be guest editors and authors, their journal has published some highly cited articles, including one written by Yan himself. These articles helped to increase the impact factor of their journal which successfully entered SSCI in 2012. After that, the journal works hard to maintain its quality and balance domestic and foreign papers at the same time. (J25)

Other journals also strive to include international scholars to join their editorial boards, and as readers, authors and reviewers, mainly through participating and hosting international conferences to promote visibility of their journals (J1b, J3, J4b, J18, J19, J21), inviting

submissions from potential authors in person or through emails (J8 J9), regularly emailing newsletters to potential authors while posting news on social networks such as Facebook and ResearchGate (J1b, J27), with the following quote as an example:

> Our Law department is one of the best law schools in China. But it does not have a high-quality English-language academic journal, so it is just not convincing to say how international the department is. Therefore, it's meaningful to devote into this journal in the long run…I made a list of contacts in U.S., UK, and Europe who are interested in Chinese law, including their names, affiliations, and email addresses. I attend the annual conference of the European China Law Studies Association (ECLS) almost every year. What we plan to do is to invite them to become our authors and reviewers. We've just started. It's difficult, but I think we can make it. (J24)

Major predicaments

Four major themes emerged from the data regarding challenges of journal development: English language hurdles, unfavorable position in research evaluation systems, unfamiliarity with standards of international academic writing and publishing, and tensions between international ambition and local commitment. By exploring these four correlated aspects, this section explores how the hegemonic global HSS structure and China's complex social, historical, and cultural contexts intertwine with each other, and create considerable difficulties for HSS English-language journals in China.

English Language hurdles

The language of publishing in HSS is of a social and cultural nature (Duszak and Lewkowicz 2008). Unlike STM disciplines where publishing in English has been so much more achievable for many Chinese researchers in major universities as a normal practice, in China's HSS, Chinese remains and will continue to be the dominant language of research and publication (Flowerdew and Li 2009). Chinese HSS scholars of middle and elder generations usually cannot write in English. Though on the rise, according to the interviewees, English writing ability of domestic young researchers and young returnees is not as satisfactory as they thought it would be. This is a key reason why a considerable proportion of submissions from domestic Chinese researchers

were rejected by blind peer reviewers (J1b, J3, J25). The Chinese mode of argumentation and use of English make it difficult for international readers to understand (J1b, J11).

At their initial stages of development, most China's HSS English-language journals can receive few submissions from foreign scholars and Chinese diaspora. Thus the journals need depend largely on domestic researchers. Considering the unsatisfactory English proficiency of many domestic researchers, journals have to either compromise language quality of the articles they publish or rely on translation of articles that have already been published in Chinese journals and submissions in Chinese. Yet qualified translators and copy editors are lacking, and the language ability of many editors is also a problem:

> Honestly speaking, our [the editorial team] English language proficiency is quite limited. It restricts the internationalization of our journal. (J11)
>
> For some submissions, we [the editorial team] think it is worth publishing in terms of content but not language, but we just don't know how to make it good. We are in short of qualified translators. (J8)
>
> One reason for the increasing influence of our journal is that we have changed and recruited professional copy editors and translators who are native English-speakers and have academic backgrounds on Chinese literature. Language is very important for journals in the humanities. Chinese humanities haven't solved the problem of English-language. The language of the books we [China] translated (from Chinese to English) and published overseas is barely OK. (J3)

Despite English language challenges, a few editors explicitly claimed that English language is not an insurmountable barrier (J6a, J12, J13, J21, J24). According to them, it is the research contents and ideas rather than language itself that are the key issue (J21, J24). Regarding English as a "tool" (J21) and a "means of cross-cultural communication" (J12, J19a), some editors returned from Anglophone countries demonstrated a high level of rational confidence based on deep thinking, as illustrated by following quote:

> It is true that language is inherently cultural and often embodies power relations. That's why Levenson said China provided the world "vocabulary", but the West introduces a "language" to China. However, international communication is unavoidable and English is the most convenient lingua franca. We shouldn't marginalize ourselves as "others", and

they (the Anglo-American academia) as the mainstream "we". English does not just belong to US or UK. It can be a language for us, a language for the whole. (J12)

Unfavorable position in research evaluation systems

Almost all the interviewees mentioned the quantity and quality of submissions to the journal as a key challenge. One major reason is the research evaluation systems both inside China and internationally. With globalization, rankings and league tables have become parts of the global governance of higher education. In HSS, SSCI and A&HCI are increasingly used to measure the global impact of journals and individual articles, and to assess the performance of institutions and individual scholars (Chou and Chan 2017). This is especially the case in China and other East Asian societies, which are eager to pursue a world-class status in global higher education (Lo 2011) and where the research systems are governed by administrative power in a top-down manner (Zhu 2009).

Currently there are two domestic evaluations of HSS English-language journals in China. The first is the "Annual Report for International Citation of Chinese Academic Journals" issued annually by CNKI since 2012. It evaluates the international impact of both English-language and Chinese-language academic journals in China. The second is the Attraction, Management, and Impact (AMI) Comprehensive Evaluation of HSS English-language journals conducted by CASS for the first time in 2018. Neither of the two assessments have been used by Chinese institutions in research evaluations, partly because they are still at their preliminary stages and not sophisticated enough (Li and Lv 2015). Accordingly, evaluation of HSS English-language journals in China is still largely guided by SSCI and A&HCI, which an overwhelming majority of the journals (60 out of the 66) are not indexed in. Their unfavorable positions in international and domestic evaluation systems have made it difficult for them to attract both international and domestic submissions:

We face many challenges. The biggest one is that we lack submissions, especially high-quality submissions. I feel that SSCI is much more influential in Mainland China now than several years ago when I worked in Hong Kong. An increasingly-narrow focus on meeting quantitative metrics prevails in higher education institutions and academic organizations.

Young academics need to publish in SSCI or CSSCI[3] for promotion. Our journal belongs to neither. This makes it difficult for us to attract international or domestic submissions. (J18)

Other results from English-language journals' unfavorable position in domestic evaluation system include insufficient human resources, efforts, and support invested on these journals (J11, J12, J13, J24). As an editor in the field of economics and finance commented, "my working priority is the Chinese-language journal [the editorial office also hosts a domestically leading Chinese-language journal] first, my own research second, and the English-language journal last. Because English-language journal is least weighted in evaluations". (J11) There are journals, however, with strong support from their hosting organizations, such as the new-born *ECNU Review of Education*. In some cases, the hosting universities sit on the top of the higher education system, and their English-language journals are treated as core journals in the evaluation within their affiliated institutions, such as Beijing Normal University and *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*, and Renmin University of China and *Economic and Political Studies*. Nevertheless, a more general scenario is that, as a relatively new development, the status of HSS English-language journals in China's higher education system is still unclear, neither to policy-makers, nor to practitioners. Under this circumstances, as commented by one editor, "some journals are more rhetoric than substance. You even cannot find where to browse their current or archive issues" (J15).

Unfamiliarity with standards of international academic writing and publishing

Many domestic Chinese researchers and some editors themselves are not familiar with standards of international academic writing and publishing. Only a small fraction of journals have developed a fair understanding of what an international journal looks like and how to operate accordingly. For example, among the 27 interviewed journals, about 12 journals only publishes original articles while other journals rely on translated articles at varying degrees; even fewer journals (about 8) have achieved double-blind peer review.

In terms of academic writing, there are "different ideas of standards for scholarship" (J22) between the Chinese academia and the international. A number of interviewees mentioned that

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[3] Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) published by Nanjing University is an authoritative citation index commonly used in Mainland China to measure HSS journals in the Chinese language. Usually it does not include English-language journals.

some manuscripts by Chinese researchers do not appropriately accord with Western standards (J1b, J15, J17, J19a, J22). Major problems include unfamiliarity with international literature and failing to back up their arguments with solid evidence and providing sources. As one UK-returned editor commented, "many manuscripts of Chinese researchers do not engage with the studies by other scholars especially those by international scholars, let alone incorporating the literature into their argument to offer a background for their own studies. This makes it extremely difficult for them to dialogue with the existing literature internationally. International scholars therefore often don't know where to locate this kind of research" (J19a). Even worse, some manuscripts have a strong propaganda orientation, which has severely affected the academic rigor of their journals (Li and Lv 2015).

As previously introduced, 47 (71%) journals choose to cooperate with international publishers (concentrated in Western countries) with the hope that this would improve their international visibility and impact. Editorial services provided by the international publisher is useful for the journals to establish standardized ways of working (J19b). Several editors acknowledged the brand effect brought by the international publishers to help their journals' visibility (J9, J21, J25). However, many more editors complained that the quality and impact had barely improved after years of the partnership, because international publishers usually only provide services such as typesetting, layout, publication, feedback report and so on, even language polishing is not included in their service package (e.g., J15, J22). Some editors were concerned that financial pressure caused by the high cost of the partnership might further restrict a sustainable development of their journals (e.g., J11, J18).

Tensions between international ambition and local commitment

As discussed earlier, HSS English-language journals in China aim to deal with Euro-American hegemony and facilitate genuine dialogue across cultures in HSS research. To achieve this, journals need to publish more locally-oriented research, which integrate reflections on the local culture and/or society and/or history into one's research themes and approaches (Author 2013). However, under a hegemonic knowledge structure, internationalization of a non-Western journal to a great extent means 'Westernization'. These journals are struggling to strike a balance between their international ambition and local obligations. Although many expressed their concerns about "over-internationalization" (J1b) and "losing academic locality and autonomy" (J15), most of the interviewees in the social sciences admitted that SSCI was regarded as a

significant goal of their journals for realistic considerations. Even SSCI or A&HCI are not regarded as a major target in the humanities, the journals also orient to the 'golden standards' set by Western practices to enhance their international recognition (J3, J5).

China Economist and *Journal of Chinese Humanities*, for instance, stick to their mission of "relaying mainland Chinese scholarship to reach the outside world" (J22). They deliberately select, translate, and publish articles that have already been published in top Chinese journals. However, as publishing original articles is one basic requirement for SSCI and A&HCI, it is almost impossible for the two journals to be included in the indexing systems. This type of journals faces even more obstacles to become internationally visible and recognized. *Social Sciences in China*, a journal mainly publishes translated articles from its Chinese version, is another telling example. The Chinese version of *Social Sciences in China* (*Journal of Zhongguo Shehui Kexue*) is a highly established and leading journal in China. However, the international influence of its English version, in terms of impact factor and indexing situation, has grown very slowly since its establishment in 1980.

There are some other recurrent issues mentioned by the editors about the current situation of HSS research in China. They include lacking original theoretical contributions (J5, J11, J12, J18, J24, J26), catch-up mentality (J10, J20), over-pragmatism (J14), and cultural nationalism (J12). With such issues, editors felt obstacles very strongly in real dialogue between Chinese and Western scholarship (J1b, J4a, J17a, J19a, J27), as illustrated by the following quote:

> We've translated and published articles written by leading Chinese scholars, but their number of downloads are much smaller than those articles written by young Chinese diasporas. The number of downloads of some of those articles is almost zero. I suppose foreign scholars may have problems in getting the ideas of Chinese scholars. Sometimes it's really difficult to engage in an effective dialogue between Chinese and Western scholars. It seems that they talk in different discourses and/or paradigms. (J4a)

These problems have greatly restricted the quality of China's domestic research produced in China and by the Chinese. Therefore, such studies have so far achieved little in their dialogue with foreign scholars. Historical reasons are important for understanding these problems. HSS as disciplines in China can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when China looked to the West for knowledge to 'save the nation'. With a catch-up anxiety, similar to how Connell (2007) observed Indian scholarship, Chinese intellectuals are forced to relegate local bodies of thought to the past, to treat them as 'traditions' of historical or ethnographic interest,

but not as sources of intellectual authority in the present. China's rich heritages of social thinking have seldom been incorporated into modern social research. This has led to a paradox in today's HSS research in China: while local identity and commitment is increasingly emphasized among the researchers, Chinese intellectual traditions have been underrepresented and undertheorized in modern research, as commented by an editor holding a PhD in history from USA:

> During the New Cultural Movement in early twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals started a radical anti-traditionalism which resulted in later generations' failure in absorbing benefits from Chinese traditions. That's why Chinese intellectuals lost their identity during the process of modernization, and have been struggling in the Western shadow. This cultural rupture is still haunting HSS research in China. Elite scholars are hardly capable of rebuilding Chinese cultural core in modern times. (J12)

Confronting with tensions and dilemmas, the journals are still making efforts to carry forward the dialogue between Chinese and international scholarship. They are meaningful both theoretically and in terms of the international scholarly realities. Some editors are positive about the current struggling stage of the journals, thinking they would "pass through it" (J6a).

Discussion and conclusion

Most HSS English-language journals in China are a top-down initiative aiming at international influence enhancement, but they enjoy considerable autonomy in operation and are largely practiced based on academic rationales. Research findings show that these journals have made valuable attempts in opening up research imaginaries and contributing to alternative discourses through introducing indigenous Chinese research to the outside world and encouraging discussions re-contextualizing and re-examining existing concepts and approaches. The interviewed editors have shown a clear awareness of the Euro-American hegemony in global knowledge production, and perceived their journals as a platform for multiple understandings, especially for voices from the periphery. Some editors, especially those trained in Anglo-American centers, have demonstrated 'double knowing' capacities (Singh and Han 2010, p.188), with deep reflections on problems and struggles in both international and Chinese academia.

However, due to a variety of factors, both domestic and international, the journals are still at a preliminary stage of development with limited international impact. There is a lack of

coordination in various aspects and on different levels in China's HSS 'going-out' initiative. For example, on one hand, Chinese government has been encouraging the development of English-language journals; on the other hand, these journals are at an unfavorable position in domestic research evaluation system, restricting their capacity in attracting high-quality domestic submissions. Hegemonic global HSS structure is still powerful and has caused predicaments for the journals. They have encountered immense challenges to become internationalized. Chinese researchers are not yet linguistically and academically well-prepared to blend the theoretical constructs and themes developed in the center with those derived from local intellectual traditions (Takayama 2011). Unfinished integration between Chinese and Western knowledge will continue to cause sufferings for HSS development in China.

Implications can be drawn regarding development of these journals, and more broadly similar journals in non-Western societies. On national level, it is necessary to explicitly support domestic English-language journals in policy. Improving domestic evaluations on English-language journals and incorporating them into existing research evaluation system should be placed on the agenda, so as to reduce the dependence on SSCI and A&HCI. On institutional and individual level, more substantial resources and efforts should be invested in the journals. Tensions need to be balanced between the journals' international ambitions and local obligations, and between realistic strategies in enhancing international visibility by inevitably orienting to Western research agenda at varying degrees and a long-term vision of contributing to 'alternative discourses' in HSS research. History illustrates how reciprocity across cultures has nurtured knowledge development (Hayhoe and Pan 2001). A perspective of civilizational dialogue (Hayhoe 1995) rather than 'the clash of civilizational blocs' (Huntington 1996) might contribute more constructively to 'translating' truly different science approaches (Weidemann 2013). In this regard, China's HSS English-language journals provide us with a telling case to observe how to develop self-consciously counter-Eurocentric and counter-hegemonic HSS (Alatas 2006).

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