

Academic Culture: A missing analytical aspect to understand the globalizing academic work

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Kazumi Okamoto Ph.D.
Secretary General
World SSH Net

Introduction

When globalization and/ or internationalization of social science is discussed, there are certain types of discourses among social science academics around the world. Probably the most prominent discourse among them is debates focusing on unequal situations of academic knowledge creation and distribution to the world especially in developing countries, which is often referred as South. Similarly, such a structure is named as 'academic dependency' (Alatas, 2003) and 'academic imperialism' (ibid.) to depict the power structure between social science academics around the world. As the World Social Science Report (2010) broadly discusses, it seems a long-term trend in social science to put great emphasis on the limited number of academics, mainly those who work for prestigious Western universities and publish their work in English, is more benefited from their work condition than those who do not have such work condition and work in other languages than English. Therefore, it is sometimes English language that is to be blamed, and accordingly, the current citation mechanism exploiting the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) and Art and Humanities Citation Index (AHCI) to measure social science academics work, in which overrepresentation of English language is observed, is also to be blamed by those who are not able to be involved in work in English. Description as such goes on about disparity of funding opportunities, Eurocentricism of academic work, and any other 'winner-loser relationship' (Okamoto, 2013) mainly between West/ North/ Centre and non-West/ South/ Periphery.

Although the relevance of such discussions can be understood, the discussion about globalization/ internationalization of social science has been too much caught by finding how unfair the current situation is for academics who are not benefited from the current academic knowledge creation and distribution system. Consequently, overall discussion about internationalization of social science knowledge generation activities including international academic collaboration does not move forward into a new phase of discussion. Rather, it seems to be understood that discussions about internationalization of social science knowledge and/ or of knowledge generation practices are synonymous with discussions about enumerating "unfair" academic conditions from the less privileged side. Therefore, one of the problems relating to the topic of internationalization of social science knowledge generation practice is that social science academics have not paid much attention to any other aspects than the aforementioned aspects focusing on unequal academic work conditions.

Aims of the Paper

This paper, therefore, aims at presenting another approach to discussing about internationalization of social science knowledge generation practice distancing from the existing mainstream approach. This does not mean to disrespect the above-mentioned discussions about the topic, but to open up a new discussion on the topic from a totally different perspective. Since the current discussion seems circular and repetitive, and has

not managed to offer us a new horizon of discussion, any other alternative approaches should be sought. Thus, this paper attempts to present an approach that helps us think about the topic from various perspectives.

Analytical Framework to Understand Globalizing Academic Work

When thinking about knowledge generation practices in social science, it is not unimportant to observe and analyse how academic work in social science is practiced under what kind of work condition, because work condition and work practices are foundations from which academic knowledge is generated. It is also important to notice that such aspects have been largely ignored to study so far as if there was no necessity for observation and analyses about them. This attitude seems to stem from a taken-for-granted view of academic work that academic work practice and condition is universally the same. It can be said that they look very similar in many parts of the world. However, it has never been clear whether work setting, condition, environment, practices, and philosophy in academic work are all the same around the world. Especially, when we discuss about internationalization/ globalization of social science knowledge and/ or of knowledge generation practices in context of international academic collaboration, the aforementioned ignored aspects are relevant for investigation. For, knowledge as outcome of such aspects might involve more diverse background, setting, motivation, reason, etc. to be generated. Up until now, the discussion about internationalization of social science (and of social science knowledge) has been outcome-based discussion. In other words, we simply compared knowledge A with knowledge B, disregarding how and why they were generated, then judged them as knowledge A is more privileged than knowledge B, due to the country, the academic institute, and the language that the knowledge A comes from and is written.

In order to unveil those ignored aspects, I developed an analytical framework to understand academic work, especially knowledge generation practices. The framework is named as “academic culture”(Okamoto, 2016). Although I understand that some might imagine I would look for a certain ‘national’ academic culture by this framework, this is not my intention. The term ‘culture’ is often understood as description of a particular national/ ethnic group of people’s characteristics that are not shared with other (heterogeneous) groups. However, in the context of academic culture, culture rather means something that can be shared among people regardless their nationalities/ ethnicities. Academic culture is shared aspects that are rooted in work of academics in social science around the world, and does not intend to find out differences between different countries, but to truly understand what academics do towards knowledge generation under what work condition. After understanding academic culture in various locations, it will be easier to analyze why international academic collaborations are uneasy to carry out, how to achieve better international collaboration, and other fundamental issues that might hinder us from fruitful academic collaborations.

Academic culture consists of two broad categories: Academic environment and academic practices. Academic environment includes:

- National Science Policy
- Roles of Higher Education and Institutional Research Policy
- Mission of Academics in Society: Roles and Expectations in Society
- Academic Knowledge in Society: Roles and Perception of Knowledge
- Roles of Academic Knowledge in Society/Relationship between Academic Knowledge and Society
- How Is Academic Knowledge Understood, Valued, and Interpreted?
- Perceptions of Academic Knowledge: the Academics’ Perspectives.

This category refers to not only the work environment such as national science policy and roles of higher education, but also the environment related to knowledge and academic people. It might look uninfluential to academic knowledge generation practices, but roles of academic knowledge as well as roles of academic people in society is considered to play a role as the environment for academics to generate knowledge. Academic practices refer to:

- Academic Discourse Practice
- Publication Practices
- Managing Academic Activities
- Knowledge Acquisition Practices
- Disciplinary Practices
- Social Relations in Academic Work

Academic practices are more straightforward, which describe aspects of daily academic work life. However, since the topic focuses on knowledge generation practices, this category does not intentionally deal with teaching activities. Social relations in academic work attempts to observe whether or not a particular communication style/ so-called national culture influences academic work.

When all the above aspects are observed and analyzed, we will more precisely understand how knowledge in social science is generated. This, therefore, will help us think how we are able to develop better international academic collaborations in order to generate more globalized social science knowledge across national borders. Through work environment and work practices, how and why academic knowledge is generated in a country would be clarified, as well as what knowledge is generated in a country. If there are some diverse aspects seen in other countries, those diversities can be a reason for difficulty and/ or problems in international academic collaboration. In this very sense, this new analytical framework “academic culture” will be able to further a new type of discussion about internationalization of social science.

Case Study in Japan and Scrutiny of Academic Culture in Other Country Settings

Outline of academic culture is briefly explained above, and some examples in Japan will be exhibited in this section, in order to show the readers how this new framework works. Although all aspects about the case in Japan cannot be exhibited, due to the size of the study, some points which may interest the readers will be selected. Adding to the case in Japan, I will attempt to invite the conference participants in Lisbon to share their own views about some aspects of academic culture that were posed in the study in Japan. By doing so, this framework will be theoretically more refined and scrutinized, as well as that we will be able to start exploring academic culture in diverse country settings. After the conference, a brief analysis of inputs from the conference participants will be carried out, and the analysis will be revealed in a conference publication at the later stage.

References

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