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Marketization of universities in China:

A critical discourse analysis of the university president's message¹

Abstract

This article focuses on the global phenomenon of the marketization of higher education and how it has shaped the discourses of China's top universities. By analyzing the university presidents' messages published in the websites of 36 top-ranked universities in China, the aim is to ascertain the extent to which this institutionalized genre imbricates a marketizing role with other ideological imperatives. Informed by the theoretical principles of Critical Discourse Analysis and adopting a genre analysis methodological approach, we first examined the macro-level rhetorical structure followed by a micro-level analysis of the discursive strategies used in the presidents' messages. The findings reveal a dynamic interweaving of three distinct discursive strands – bureaucratic, conversational and advertising – constructed in and around the move structure of the presidents' messages. This interdiscursive analysis reveals competing imperatives and contestations that reflect the dual role of the presidents' messages to project a globalized, international outlook while maintaining an allegiance to political ideologies and national interests that top-ranked universities in China have to simultaneously negotiate.

Keywords

Marketization of universities, critical discourse analysis, genre analysis, interdiscursive analysis, president's message, China

¹ This is the accepted version. Readers are kindly referred to the published version in *Discourse and*

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Introduction

The impact of globalization has brought about substantive transformations and institutional restructuring in the domain of higher education around the world (Burbules and Torres, 2000; Kwong, 2000; McCaig, 2010; Mok and Tan, 2004; Stromquist, 2002). This transformative and reconstituting process has produced what is known as the marketization of higher education, where higher education institutes (henceforth HEIs) are impelled to position themselves as if they were ‘ordinary businesses competing to sell their products to consumers’ (Fairclough, 1993: 141). The process involves commodifying academic education, which entails transforming higher education into a lucrative sphere of economic activity where the quality of academic education is measured by quantifiable performative accomplishments, such as global ranking performance. Concomitantly, it also reshapes the relationship between academics and students into a transactional exchange of a commodity (academic knowledge) between service providers and customers (Furedi, 2010; Tomlinson, 2017; Nixon et al., 2018). Against this backdrop, one of the core challenges for universities to sustain their competitiveness in the educational marketplace is to enhance their prestige, since a university’s international standing is a key indicator of its quality; to this end, external accreditations and league table rankings, which influence stakeholders’ perceptions of

their standing, become the strategic focus for many universities (Pucciarelli and Kaplan, 2016).

As one of the world's fastest growing economies, China is under similar pressures to globalize its economy and marketize its HEIs in order to meet the changing economic and social needs and aspirations of the largest population in the world (Chan and Mok, 2001; Mok, 2005; Yin and White, 1994). However, unlike western economies, China has long been under the governance of a 'centrally planned' system, which has shaped many aspects of its political, economic, social and cultural life, including the positioning and functions of its nearly three thousand colleges and universities. This is one reason why, outside China, little is known despite the radical transformations of the Chinese higher education system (Ryan, 2011). The purpose of this paper is therefore to shed some light on China's higher education system by focusing on the university presidents' messages (PMs) published in the websites of its top-ranked universities to ascertain how these universities have endeavoured to respond to the imperatives of globalization and marketization while maintaining their key roles and responsibilities in the eyes of China's central government.

In the subsequent sections, we will first provide a brief background of China's higher education system with a focus on recent reforms introduced. This is followed by a discussion of the literature pertaining to the theoretical orientation of this study and its empirical applications in the context of higher education. The methodology employed in

this study is then outlined before the findings of our analysis of the PMs are presented.

The paper ends with a discussion of our findings and their implications.

China's higher education

One vital observation to be made about the marketization of higher education in China is that it is closely connected with China's broader policy shifts since the 1970s. One significant reform sees the dismantling of a 'centrally planned' system with a concomitant shift towards a 'socialist market economy' (Mok, 2005; Mok and Chan, 2001). This was premised on the belief that an economy without competitive pressure would ultimately witness a collapse in innovation and stagnation in economic development. Education in general, and higher education in particular, became an integral part of China's national strategy to meet the goals of socio-economic development by providing quality labour force and advancing scientific and technological developments (Chan and Mok, 2001). Correspondingly, the governance model in higher education evolved from a static, unitary system with direct government control and intervention into a relatively more dynamic, diversified one, where HEIs are accorded greater autonomy to respond to the pressures of external competition, albeit under the close guidance and monitoring of the central government (Mok, 2005; Mok and Chan, 2001).

As part of its strategic plans to promote competitiveness among Chinese universities in the knowledge-based global economy, China's central government initiated a number of funding projects to build world-class universities and disciplines for the 21st century.

‘Project 211’ (211 工程) was introduced in 1995 by China’s Ministry of Education (MOE) to inject ‘competition’ into the higher education sector, which is said to epitomize the market-oriented approach (Chan and Mok, 2001). About 100 HEIs were eligible for inclusion in this project based on ‘quantifiable, objective criteria’ (Mok, 2000: 119). A few years later in 1999, ‘Project 985’ (985 工程) was initiated to further select 39 universities among those already in ‘Project 211’. This was a result of the insignificant institutional impact brought about by ‘Project 211’ due to the cumulatively massive but individually meager share of financial support for the ‘211’ universities (Cheng and Wang 2012). The smaller elite pool of the ‘985’ universities enjoyed preferential allocation of resources to realize China’s ambition of establishing world-class universities (Zong and Zhang, 2019). However, speculation swirled around inefficiency and ineffectiveness, which may have resulted from a lack of systematic evaluation and competitive mechanism among the ‘985’ universities (Liu and Fang, 2016; Zong and Zhang, 2019). This is probably why a new project, the ‘Double Top University Plan’ (双一流大学), was launched in 2017 by the central government to replace the ‘211’ and ‘985’ projects. As reported by *China Daily*, the largest English portal in China, the universities were screened based on peer competition, expert reviews and government evaluation. As a result, 42 universities were shortlisted for the Top University Plan and another 95 institutions for the Top Discipline Plan (China Daily, 2017). They are regularly assessed under the government’s monitoring to justify their eligibility for grants.

This multifarious, dynamic process of screening and assessment clearly reflects the internal competition (re)introduced by the government in response to the external competition from the global higher education market.

Literature review

This study adopts the theoretical orientation of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which views the relationship between discursive and social structures as dialectical (Fairclough, 1992, 2001; van Dijk, 1993). In other words, discourse is not merely socially constituted but also socially constitutive (Fairclough, 2001; van Dijk, 1993). Simply put, every discourse simultaneously reflects and reinforces the society that produces it. This study was aimed at showing how the market and possibly other socio-political ideologies are constituted and reproduced by the discursive practices of HEIs through the genre of PMs among China's elite universities. Specifically, it seeks to investigate the marketization of China's universities by examining the interdiscursive character of the genre of PMs. Interdiscursivity refers to the hybridization of discourses and genres in a single genre, or genre mixing (Bhatia, 2008, 2010; Fairclough, 1995, 2003), by 'appropriating or establishing conventions or resources associated with genres and practices' (Bhatia, 2010: 35). According to Fairclough (2003: 28), analysis of interdiscursivity 'brings a social perspective into the heart and fine detail of the text' and thus mediates between linguistic analysis of a text and social analysis of social practices (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1992, 2003).

Applications of CDA in the context of higher education have been numerous and varied. By analyzing academic job advertisements, program materials, academic curriculum vitae and undergraduate prospectuses from a British university, Fairclough (1993) identified the textual traces of marketization of higher education and argued that promotional discourse has transformed the discourse of British universities. Following this seminal study, a number of studies have examined this phenomenon in different contexts. Among studies that investigated the generic structure of university discourses, Askehave (2007) found that the prospectuses of a Scottish university resembled a promotional genre indicative of the values and pressures from the free market. Similarly, Osman (2008) conducted a genre analysis of the corporate brochures of Malaysian university brochures, and found that their structural organization is aligned with the general functions of corporate brochures. This led her to conclude that Malaysian universities are functioning as market-oriented corporations to promote the quality of their academic programs and facilities.

Apart from genre analysis, analysis of the lexico-grammatical features of university discourses has also shed light on the identities of academic institutions and faculty-student relationships. For instance, Askehave's (2007) lexico-grammatical analysis reveals the university's tendency to establish its identity as a service-provider in the travel/tourist industry, and a close, personal relationship between the writer (the university) and the reader (prospective students). In another study, Teo (2007) compared

the discourse properties of two university prospectuses in Singapore. He found that a government-subsidized public university adopted a more traditional university-centered stance, while a business-oriented private university adopted a much less authoritative stance. He concluded that the two universities in form as well as function, albeit to varying extents, have become business-like under the pressures of globalization and marketization.

Besides studies on university brochures and prospectuses, there were studies that investigated the mission statements presented by universities. For example, Connell and Galasiński's (1998) analysis of 146 mission statements of UK's HEIs suggests a 'structural re-alignment' that reflects the universities' acknowledgement of the political-ideological context where they are encouraged to be more 'business like' in meeting the needs of students (Connell & Galasiński, 1998: 476). In a similar study, Sauntson and Morrish (2011) conducted a corpus linguistic analysis of mission statements of 53 UK universities, and found that the most prominent feature is the marketing of the university brand. In yet another study, Mautner (2005) investigated the phenomenon of the colonization of academia by examining the discursive repertoire (e.g. 'business-related lexis') of data collected mainly from the Internet. She found that 'enterprise', 'enterprising', 'entrepreneur' and 'entrepreneurial' were keywords that reflected the market ideology in academia. She then contended that this institutional discourse of self-

promotion, or ‘discursive alignment with business’ (Mautner, 2005: 113), is complicit in the establishment of academic entrepreneurship.

The findings of these studies on the marketization of higher education in various parts of the world are echoed by similar studies in China. Xiong (2012) examined 48 advertisements for university academic positions and found an intertextual mixing of bureaucratic and promotional discourses, which indicates a confluence between bureaucratic powers and market forces. This interplay of seemingly contradictory discursive strategies is interpreted as a result of a negotiation between the universities’ desire to uphold hierarchical authority while embracing a promotional culture. In another study of 86 Chinese university presidents’ speeches delivered at graduation ceremonies, Han (2014) uncovered a predominance of authoritative discourse, which was interpreted as reflective of the institutional reality that Chinese universities are operating under a centralized system supervised by the State. He argued that the rhetorical strategies employed by the university presidents represent their efforts to adapt their identity to the socio-political context of Chinese universities. These findings suggest that the marketization of higher education in China is complex and needs to be understood in its particular political, cultural and educational contexts.

Inspired and informed by these studies, the present study was aimed at investigating the marketization of higher education in China by analyzing the PMs published in the university websites. The universities chosen for this study are mainly key national

universities directly affiliated to China's MOE, which have received considerable funds from the Chinese government under one or more of the national funding projects introduced earlier. In China, university presidents are appointed directly by the MOE or the provincial education departments under it. The president is the head and leader of the university and what they say in the PMs and published in the university websites can thus be seen as an epitome of the ethos and philosophy of the university. Arguably, the PM encapsulates and embodies the university's marketization tendency much more explicitly and directly than other genres of university discourse. An investigation of this highly institutionalized genre can therefore offer important insights into the marketization of higher education in China. This study is interested in the marketization of higher education as reflected in, and reinforced through, the genre of PMs as an authoritative medium of publicizing and promulgating China's very best universities to the rest of the world. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the generic and interdiscursive characteristics of the presidents' messages?
2. To what extent and how do these characteristics reflect the marketization of higher education in China?

Methodology

Data

The data for this study were collected from the official websites of Chinese universities selected on the basis of two criteria. First, the universities had to be included in the 2018 edition of the *Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings* (QS) and the *Times Higher Education World University Rankings* (THE). The two ranking lists were chosen because they are among the most widely accepted internationally. *Quacquarelli Symonds* is a higher education analyst firm based in London that computes data from more than 1,200 universities across 78 countries, while *Times Higher Education* claims to be the only global university performance system to judge over 1,250 research-intensive universities across areas like teaching, research, knowledge transfer, and international outlook (see QS and THE websites). Global university rankings expose HEIs to competitive pressures that have escalated in higher education markets, intranational or international (Marginson and Van der Wende, 2007). This is because HEIs' positions in those rankings are considered as measures of performance in education that fuel further competition (Torrance, 2006). Instead of relying on either one of the ranking lists, this study drew on both lists to reduce the element of bias that might be present in either list. The resulting list of universities is therefore a more objective representation of the top-ranked universities in China, as indicated by *both* the QS and THE lists.

Secondly, the official websites of the Chinese universities had to have an English version of the PM, which constitutes the object of analysis. While most of China's top universities have an English version of the PM, not all do. One notable exception is Fudan

University, which is widely regarded as among the top universities in China. The fact that the universities had an English version of the PM would suggest a desire to project an international, globalized image in line with marketization. As Altbach and Knight (2007) have observed, the use of English as the lingua franca for dissemination of knowledge and academic communication is a result of the internationalization and globalization of higher education. While this suggests that the universities selected for inclusion in the study might be predisposed to marketization, it would be interesting to examine the extent, and how, this marketization is discursively manifested in the PMs. Using these two criteria, 36 Chinese universities were identified (see Appendix 1) and their PMs extracted for analysis in the study.

Data Analysis

To unpack the genre characteristics of the PMs, a rhetorical move analysis approach developed from the genre theory conceptualized by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (2013) was adopted. Following Biber et al. (2007: 34), a corpus-based rhetorical move analysis was conducted. First, a preliminary list of move types and their rhetorical functions were identified with reference to existing research (e.g. Askehave, 2007; Osman, 2008; Xiong, 2012). Following this, a tentative coding scheme was developed on the basis of these move types and used to pilot code a representative sample of the PMs to test its robustness. This coding scheme was subsequently revised in light of the data, as some move categories were combined or removed and new ones emerged. Based on this pilot coding,

a coding scheme comprising six distinct move types and their descriptors was developed. Using this coding scheme, 20% of PMs ($n=7$) were independently coded by one of the authors and an applied linguistics doctoral student who had done prior research on move analysis. Before the coding, a training session was provided to familiarize the second coder with the coding scheme. An inter-coder reliability check was conducted to establish coding reliability and validity. Cohen's Kappa coefficient (0.743) indicated good inter-coder agreement (Hartmann, 1977). Whatever minor discrepancies in the coding were resolved through discussion and analysis, on the basis of which refinements were made to the coding scheme. It was on the basis of this final coding scheme that the remaining PMs in the corpus were coded (see Appendix 2 for a sample coding).

Following the rhetorical move analysis to uncover the macro-structure of the PMs, the micro-level lexico-grammatical features within the structure of the PMs were examined to uncover the discursive strategies employed to achieve the rhetorical effects of the PMs. Analytic concepts from systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (Halliday, 1978, 1994) were used to explore the identity construction, interpersonal meaning and organizational structures in the PMs to uncover its ideological postures. SFL was employed as an interpretative and explanatory lens with which to interpret and explain some of the rhetorical moves identified in the PMs and not simply to describe the linguistic features of the PMs.

On the basis of these macro- and micro-level analyses of the PMs, various discourses that are embedded and imbricated within the interdiscursive structure of the PMs as a whole were identified. It is hoped that this fine-grained and multi-layered analysis would offer insights into the extent and how the marketization of public universities in China is discursively manifested, thereby contributing to our understanding of the broader transformation of social practices in this growing superpower.

Findings

The macro rhetorical structure of the 36 PMs, showing the six rhetorical moves identified and their functions, is presented in Table 1 below. It also provides illustrations, extracted from various PMs, of how these moves are typically realized at lexico-grammatical level (indicated in bold).

Table 1. Move structure and lexico-grammatical realization of the PMs

Move	Function	Example
Welcoming Remark	Aims to capture readers' attention or connect with readers by greeting them or introducing the university.	Welcome to South China University of Technology, whether you are here to study, do research, or you've just come to visit! [SCUT]
Mission Statement	Offers information about the aim and mission of the university, and the	... Beijing Normal University has tirelessly pursued a goal of inner quality development and has been working to deepen

	contributions the university strives to make.	educational and pedagogical reforms, and steadily improving quality and talents development. [BNU]
University Profile	Establishes the university's credentials by highlighting its: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>academic strength</u>: extols the university's research achievements, facilities, faculty and students, academic programs, and quality graduates and alumni. 2. <u>historical tradition</u>: portrays the history and tradition of the university, such as the origin of the university's name and its cultural heritage. 3. <u>physical landscape</u>: stresses the location and size of the university. 4. <u>political support</u>: emphasizes the governmental recognition and administrative affiliation by stating the support and evaluation from political leaders and governmental institutions. 5. <u>social responsibility</u>: highlights the contributions the university has made to the nation and the society. 	<p>The University boasts 53 first-level disciplines, 12 of which were ranked among the world's top 1% by ESI. [XMU]</p> <p>Established in 1896 as Nan Yang College, Shanghai Jiao Tong University is one of the first national institutions of higher learning in China. The name "Jiao Tong" comes from the book Yi Jing. [SJTU]</p> <p>SDU is situated in Shandong Province, the birthplace of Qi-Lu culture ... [SDU]</p> <p>In 2017, it was chosen to participate in the Double First-Class plan, which includes major support from the Chinese Ministry of Education and other government departments to build a world-class university with world-class disciplines. [CUFA]</p> <p>Nanjing University and its predecessors have taken responsibility for the country</p>

		<p>and the nation during its development of over 100 years...Nanjing University makes significant contributions to the revitalization of China. [NJU]</p>
	<p>6. <u>global outlook</u>: emphasizes the university's role in international cooperation and programs, and its global vision.</p>	<p>... we have forged partnerships with over 120 Institutions in more than 20 countries and regions in hosting numerous collaborative programs in an attempt to achieve our internationalization strategies. [HQU]</p>
Future Aspiration	States the university's goals and communicates its aspirations to the readers.	<p>...we will strive to develop towards the goal of building leading university around the world. [NKU]</p>
Closing Remark	Invites readers to find out more about the university, or to study or work at the university.	<p>We warmly welcome promising youths from around the world to pursue further studies at CUG. We sincerely welcome experts and scholars from different countries to work together...[CUG]</p>
Signature or Name	Provides the credentials of the President.	President Li Yanrong. [UESTC]

Our analysis of the lexico-grammatical features within each of these six moves has uncovered several interweaving discursive strands that constitute the interdiscursive structure of the PMs. What follows is a discussion of three discourses identified in the PMs to highlight the particular ways in which the marketization of higher education in China is discursively materialized.

Bureaucratic discourse

The universities included in the corpus for this study are all prestigious institutions that have benefited considerably from generous funding by the Chinese central government, and can be seen to operate according to ‘a quasi-bureaucratic system modeled on the government’ (Xiong, 2012: 328). 33 of the 36 universities in our data are included in the ‘Double Top University Plan’. This official recognition and affiliation is discursively manifested in various ways in the PMs. For instance, the bureaucratic connections of the university are underlined by phrases that allude directly to its governmental affiliation and support as seen in the following examples:

1. *The University is a comprehensive institution of higher education directly affiliated with China’s Ministry of Education, and it has recently been chosen for inclusion in the Chinese Government’s Program of Building World-Class Universities and First-Class Disciplines.* [XMU]
2. *...the University has benefited from the joint construction mechanism of the Ministry of Education and Guangdong Province, the support of local governments...* [SYSU]
3. *East China University of Science and Technology has been affirmed by China’s Education Ministry as an [sic] university for admitting foreign students supported by Chinese government scholarships.* [ECUST]

As can be seen in the examples above, the universities allude to their affiliation either with the central or provincial governments or both. More than simply an act of obeisance, this can also be seen as a strategy to bolster the university's status and attractiveness in the eyes of the prospective student, both local and foreign. In example 3, for instance, we see ECUST highlighting its 'Chinese government scholarships' given to foreign students.

A more subtle strategy adopted by some universities is to establish intertextual links between its PMs and official discourses of the Chinese government. This is evident in some cases where the articulation of the university's identity and aspirations echoes the official rhetoric of the government. For instance, in the example below, TJU seems to align its own vision with the '13th Five-Year Plan' (2016-2020), which is the Chinese government's key document to address its economic, social, and educational challenges over the next five years:

4. *With the 13th-Five-Year Plan in place, TJU has clearly redefined its vision of building itself into a world-class university in the coming decades. [TJU]*

In a similar, albeit less explicit, manner, NJU's PM also echoes the values of the central government:

5. *...let's make arduous efforts to build NJU into a world-class university early and make*

greater contributions to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation! [NJU]

In this case, it seems that NJU's goal of building a world-class university is to contribute to 'the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation', which echoes the 'Chinese Dream', a core value proposed by the central government (NDRC, 2016). These direct and indirect allusions to official affiliation and bureaucratic discourses are intended to shape public opinion in such a way that links the universities concerned to a status marked by prestige and distinction.

Conversational discourse

As much as Chinese universities pledge allegiance to their government whose support and endorsement then serve to elevate and cement their status in China's higher education, they are not impervious to the global forces that are transforming education into a business in the international market. Universities around the world are no longer perceived, or function merely, as an ivory tower or a bastion of knowledge and scholarship but have become, to varying degrees, profit-oriented corporations competing for government funding and student revenue as they chase after league table rankings such as QS and THE. China's elite universities are no exception.

The imperative to promote themselves as 'world-class' institutions that can compete with other global universities to attract the best and the brightest has shaped the discourse

of China's higher education in distinct ways. One way is by adopting a conversational style to effect a friendly, intimate and interactive posture. As a genre, conversation not only indexes informality but also assumes an egalitarian relationship between the interlocutors. One manifestation of informality is the use of 'speech-like forms in writing' (Fairclough, 1992: 204). This feature of conversational discourse is especially evident in the opening lines of the PMs:

6. *Welcome to HZAU! We appreciate your visiting this website for business and for exploring the life of our campus.* [HZAU]
7. *Welcome to study in SDU!* [SDU]
8. *Welcome to South China University of Technology, whether you are here to study, do research, or you've just come to visit!* [SCUT]

This colloquial yet polite introduction evinces informality and mimics the tenor of conversation in establishing a friendly and warmly welcoming tone, with the use of the exclamation mark further encoding a feeling of warmth and goodwill. This can be seen as an attempt to imitate the customer-oriented discourses of the market to draw readers to the university, and can be seen as an instantiation of advertising discourse commonly used in the tourist industry (Askehave, 2007). Similar examples are also evident in the closing of the PMs:

9. *We thank you for your attention and look forward to your arrival! Let's*

work together for a better future! [NJU]

10. *Thanks for your interest in SJTU and you are always welcome to visit us... [SJTU]*

Another salient feature of conversational discourse is the use of personal pronouns ('we' and 'you'), examples of which abound in the data including the examples cited above. This creates a colloquial, informal tenor and thus simulates a close relationship between the university president and readers. In some cases, the use of the contracted forms further colloquializes the discourse, as seen in 8 and 9.

Another important feature of conversational discourse in the PMs is the use of acronyms such as 'HZAU' (6) and 'SJTU' (10). This assumes readers' familiarity with the acronyms, and relates to the branding strategy used in the advertising industry. Whether or not readers (especially those outside of China) are familiar with the acronyms is immaterial; what is significant is the *assumption* of familiarity that creates an implicit bond between the reader and producer of the text. Related to this is the seemingly shared knowledge predicated on the president's awareness of readers' possible purposes for visiting the website as seen in 6 and 8. This reader-sensitive stance reflects the university's customer-oriented identity. Furthermore, the reference to 'business' in 6

overtly indicates that the university not only welcomes student-customers to enroll in the university but also entrepreneurs interested in business collaborations with the university.

In example 11 below, although the top-down authoritative status of the president is foregrounded ('On behalf of Tsinghua'), the sense of formality is attenuated by the use of the singular, or plural, first-person pronouns (I, my, our), which create a more personal and informal tenor. Similarly, while the use of overt politeness markers ('would like to extend my cordial greetings', 'heartfelt gratitude') might evince interpersonal distance between the president and readers, this distance is reduced by the reference to 'all friends' (who could encompass anyone from alumni to government officials) to signal an egalitarian relationship with readers.

11. *On behalf of Tsinghua, I would like to extend my cordial greetings and best wishes to our students, faculty and staff, as well as all Tsinghua alumni at home and abroad. I also offer my heartfelt gratitude to all friends for their unfailing support to Tsinghua over the years.* [THU]

Thus, within the opening and closing moves of the PM, we see signals that index the dual role of the PM to exert some degree of authoritativeness while endeavoring to bridge the interpersonal distance between the university and its students and alumni.

Advertising discourse

Besides the use of conversational features to create a friendly interpersonal stance, another key discursive feature immanent in the PMs is the appropriation of advertising discourse features. These take various forms, most notably the foregrounding of particular attributes or qualities deemed desirable to prospective students, alumni members and other stakeholders. One general but salient quality relates to the notion of excellence that the universities frequently allude to. This is not only evident in the higher ranked universities but also the lower-ranked ones as seen in the following examples:

12. *Its long and proud tradition of scholarly excellence...* [XMU]
13. *Nanjing Medical University is an institution of higher learning with a glorious history and excellent traditions.* [NMU]
14. *NPU people thrive to pursue the excellence in an open, collaborative, and innovative culture.* [NPU]
15. *It offers a platform for peoples from different cultures to build their life and pursue excellence.* [JSU]
16. *We are widely recognized as one of the most creative and influential universities in China, especially renown for our academic excellence in engineering.* [SCUT]
17. *Many of them have become outstanding scholars, important statesmen, business*

tycoons and even excellent athletes. [CUG]

While the penchant for referring to ‘excellence’ is apparent, this is often broadly construed and not confined to academic excellence or scholarship. Excellence is also ascribed to general practices like ‘traditions’ (12 & 13) or goals to be pursued (14 & 15), while others allude to more specific domains like ‘engineering’ (16) and even sports (17). Whether as a quality already manifest or an aspirational goal, excellence is clearly one of the qualities touted by the universities through the PMs.

Another distinct attribute that many of the universities foreground is having a rich heritage and long history. This foregrounding is syntactically realized through a process of positioning adverbial elements encoding the university’s history at the front of the clause. Known as thematization (Halliday, 1994), this process of moving adverbial elements into a syntactic position typically occupied by the grammatical subject has the effect of drawing readers’ attention to information that would otherwise be relegated to a more obscure position at the end of a clause. Examples of this syntactic manipulation to highlight the universities’ history abound:

18. *Since its establishment in 1898 as the first national comprehensive institution of higher learning ever founded in China, Peking University has been regarded as a symbol of modern Chinese education. [PKU]*

19. *With a 110-year history, Jinan University, or JNU, is one of the oldest universities in mainland China.* [JNU]
20. *Established in 1896 as Nan Yang College, Shanghai Jiao Tong University is one of the first national institutions of higher learning in China.* [SJTU]
21. *As one of the oldest government-run universities in China, Shandong University was founded in 1901.* [SDU]

In an era when new technologies and modern innovations are valorized and keenly pursued, it seems that the ‘old is gold’ adage is still very much applicable to universities where traditions and a time-honored history are hallmarks of an ‘established’ university. In the highly competitive higher education marketplace, it is not uncommon for universities in various countries to lay claim to being the ‘first’ (18) ‘one of the first’ (20) or ‘one of the oldest’ (21) institutions as a promotional strategy.

Besides a long history or established traditions, some of the younger universities, in particular, tend to pivot their marketing pitch on other qualities or attributes that they think might interest and attract students. Quite often, they tout their location in a historically prominent, culturally rich, or economically vibrant city or province as seen in the following instances:

22. *Welcome to Northwestern Polytechnical University (NPU) in Xi'an – an ancient*

cultural city known worldwide. [NPU]

23. *Located in Guangdong, the frontier of the reform and opening up of China, the University has four campuses in two beautiful cities: Guangzhou, the city of mountain and river, and the coastal city of Zhuhai. [SYSU]*

24. *Located in the Olympic sailing city of Qingdao, one of the most beautiful and vibrant cities on the coast of the Yellow Sea... [OUC]*

25. *SHU is very much like the City of Shanghai itself: a large, multicultural community with tremendous opportunities and resources. And, like Shanghai, it has been growing at a rapid pace over the past 2 decades... [SHU]*

Without the fame and history that more established universities can claim, some of the relatively younger universities seem to appropriate and vicariously assume the history, culture and fame from the cities or provinces within which they are situated as part of their 'branding' strategy. This sometimes extends to the physical surroundings of the universities as they portray a picturesque and postcard-pretty image of their university campus or the natural environs within which they are nestled:

26. *The city's [referring to Xiamen] ... picturesque coastal scenery, and fresh air and blue skies, also add to XMU's appeal as a top destination for students from around the world. [XMU]*

27. *Spring flowers, autumn leaves and winter snow, you will have a magic [sic] and charming adventure here. [HUST]*

By invoking notions of excellence, foregrounding its historical traditions, strategic location or picturesque landscape, the universities in our corpus are manifestly engaged in advertising discourse as a commercial enterprise would. While these qualities are targeted at readers in general, the fact that the chosen medium of the PMs is English suggests that the universities are targeting international students and not just students within China. This is sometimes explicitly stated or indirectly implied by highlighting special programs aimed at international students or by highlighting how international students enrich the cultural environment of the universities:

28. *... quality programs have been set up to foster the growth of international students at SDU...Each year, over 1,000 international students from more than 110 countries come to study at SDU, bringing to the beautiful campus a wide-range of colorful cultures. [SDU]*

29. *East China University of Science and Technology has been affirmed by China's Education Ministry as a university for admitting foreign students supported by Chinese government scholarships. It has been very attractive to international students since the 1950s, with thousands from over 80 countries having completed their education here.*

[ECUST]

Besides opting to use an international language like English in its website and explicitly targeting international students, many of the universities also demonstrate a global and cosmopolitan outlook through an emphasis on the international partnerships and collaborative ventures or faculty with distinguished international backgrounds in their PMs, as exemplified in the following:

30. *The Global Innovation Exchange (GIX) Institute, a partnership between Tsinghua, the University of Washington in Seattle and Microsoft Corporation...* [THU]
31. *It has established close collaborations with many first-class universities and high-level scientific research institutions around the world. Among them is the Johns Hopkins University-Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies...* [NJU]
32. *Nankai University has broad international communications by establishing exchanging and collaborative relationships with around 300 international universities and academic institutions.* [NKU]
33. *...XMU has forged partnerships with more than 200 higher-learning institutions in the U.K., the U.S., Japan, France, Russia, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan and engaged in substantive cooperation with 50 of the world's top 200 universities.* [XMU]

While some of the international affiliations are grounded in specifically named programs or ventures with particular universities, others are rather general and vague, with an emphasis on numbers rather than names. Regardless, they all lay claim to, and thereby reinforce the value of, having a global, cosmopolitan outlook as part of the advertising discourse that they have appropriated to marketize themselves.

To balance this outward-looking stance, many of the universities are careful to emphasize how they also look inwards at how they have contributed to the nation's achievements and nurtured some of the country's most illustrious talents:

34. *The student body, faculty, and alumni of Peking University have made significant research achievements and generated an incredible number of works of scholarship in both the arts and the sciences. [PKU]*

35. *We are proud that the University today has many distinguished scholars including academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering, professors of Thousand Talents Program, chair professors of Chang Jiang Scholars Program, and recipients of National Science Fund for Distinguished Young Scholars. [SYSU]*

36. *TJU's progress towards a world-class university will also embody China's revival and the national efforts for achieving greatness...TJU has cultivated more than 200,000 high-caliber talents with strong academic background and practical capabilities. Among them*

are the first Hague Tribunal jurist from China, Wang Ch'ung-Hui, the revolutionary Zhang Tailei...and chief designer of the Olympic Stadium "Bird Nest" Li Xinggang...

[TJU]

This imbrication of a global outlook with an investment in local talent as part of its advertising discourse reflects the universities' dual identity of wanting to become a world-class university with an international outlook while simultaneously serving national interests. It constitutes a key promotional strategy used by presidents of China's elite universities to make their universities attractive to the international academic community while bolstering their status and standing in the eyes of local stakeholders.

Discussion

Our rhetorical move analysis of the genre of PMs shows a macro-structure realized in six moves, with the universities' self-promotion being a primary function and prevalent practice. This is most clearly seen in the dominance of the University Profile move as a means to establish the credentials of the universities. According to Bhatia (2013), this function of establishing credentials is obligatory in the promotional genre. In this move, the universities are not merely providing objective information but are presenting carefully curated details and organizing them strategically so as to maximize their appeal

to their target readers, thereby blurring the lines between telling and selling. The dominance of this move in such a highly institutionalized genre as the PMs also reflects the influence of the socio-economic ideology of marketization of higher education on the Chinese universities.

Our interdiscursive analysis has shown the convergence and imbrication of three distinct discursive strands in the PMs. These are centered on articulating a strong bureaucratic affiliation, enacting a friendly relationship with readers through the appropriation of conversational discourse and, most important of all, promoting qualities, such as an ethos of excellence, a long history, and a strategic and picturesque locale, deemed attractive to both local and international stakeholders. While the bureaucratic discourse imbues authority and legitimacy in the universities through its emphasis on the links with the government or official discourses, the conversational and advertising discourses reflect a panoply of strategies that effect a friendly, welcoming interpersonal posture, while showcasing various aspects of the universities' strengths, achievements and appeal. But it is also in this bid to promote themselves in different ways that ideological slippages are seen.

While conscious of its obligations and responsibilities to the needs and priorities of the country, the university presidents are simultaneously impelled by global forces to project a global outlook. Part of this fragmented identity is also revealed in the conversational discursive features, which seek to mask the bureaucratic and authoritative

discourses. There is deliberate avoidance of a more traditional, top-down authoritative discourse and a simulation of a friendly, informal discourse to directly and actively engage readers. While these tend to occur at the opening and closing moves in the PMs, a more authoritative and formal stance seems to be enacted in the main body of the PMs. These conflicting stances, which simultaneously highlight the Chinese universities' dependence on governmental support and validation and the pressures to orient themselves to a market ethos in higher education that demands institutional autonomy as part of being a 'world-class' university (Mok, 2005; Mok and Chan, 2001), reflect the ideological dissonances that these universities have to grapple and come to terms with. While the global market-driven ideology privileges a student-centered approach and a global outlook, local sociocultural and sociopolitical values prioritize a nation-centered perspective.

This complex and multifaceted identity of elite Chinese universities is both reflected in and reinforced by the PMs' interdiscursive structure associated with bureaucratic alignment and conversational interaction. They reflect a strategic ambiguity (Eisenberg, 1984; Connell and Galasiński, 1998) that negotiates uncertainties and competing interests between the prospective students, university, and nation. They also instantiate a kind of strategic simulation that obfuscates the social distance by camouflaging the authoritative status of the universities with a simulated or synthetic personalization that masks the instrumental rationality of the universities (Fairclough, 2003). This complex interplay

among the bureaucratic, conversational and advertising discourses in the PMs reveals how the discourse of higher education in China is a highly contested space.

Apart from these ideological dissonances and slippages witnessed across the three main discursive strands, deeper signs of tension and contestation between competing imperatives and ideologies can also be detected *within* some of these strands. For instance, the discursive strategies employed to articulate a bureaucratic affiliation betray not only a close affinity between the universities and the central government of China, they also reflect a subtle tension between the university's academic identity and bureaucratic identity. On one hand, the universities need to be seen as cultivating and maintaining close ties with the government in order to continue enjoying their preferential funding and favorable status as elite universities in China. On the other, they are being steered by the global trend of marketization and the imperative to internationalize and adopt a global outlook that seem to prioritize academic autonomy over bureaucratic affiliation. These conflicting interests result in them having to perform a delicate balancing act, an ideological tussle that is sometimes played out at the intra-discursive level. For example, inscribed within the same sentence we sometimes see the coalescence of an outward vision of attaining a global status of a 'world-class university' and an inward focus on local aspirations of the Chinese society, as seen in the following:

37. ...*let's make arduous efforts to build NJU into a world-class university early and make*

greater contributions to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation! [NJU]

38. *TJU's progress towards a world-class university will also embody China's revival and the national efforts for achieving greatness.* [TJU]

39. *Building upon its contributions to Chinese society, the university is forging a path toward world-class status based on its unique characteristics.* [BUAA]

40. *... given the strong support of the Party and the government, Beijing Normal University will achieve the developmental objective of becoming a comprehensive, research-oriented and internationally reputable university...thereby contributing to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.* [BNU]

More often than not, the rhetoric appears to hinge on creating a world-class university *while* serving the needs and fulfilling the aspirations of the country, although in the case of BUAA (39), the strategy is to attain a world-class status *by* ‘building on its contributions to Chinese society’, and in the case of BNU (40) the bifocal vision is made possible only *through* the ‘strong support of the Party and the government’. Regardless, the university’s aspiration to be a world-class university and its responsibility to the nation are salient and deeply embedded within the discursive structure of the PMs, and so is the role that the government plays in both. This is probably best exemplified in PKU’s PM:

41. *With the full-hearted support from the Chinese national government, Peking University has high hopes of becoming a world-class university in the 21st century.* [PKU]

This echoes our earlier discussion regarding the imbrication of a global outlook with an investment in local talent as part of the advertising discourse. As mentioned before, this reflects the universities' dual identity of wanting to become a world-class university with an international outlook while simultaneously serving national interests. The promotion of one's university on the basis of its achievements in talent production and strong sense of social consciousness and responsibility can be construed as a form of 'societal marketing' (Kotler and Armstrong, 2011: 11). This is premised on the marketing philosophy that organizations should pay attention to what is in the best interest of a society when promoting themselves in the market. According to Laczniak and Murphy (2006), because the marketing system operates in such a broad socio-cultural context, the country's political, social and moral values should be considered in an effective marketing campaign. In this way, socially responsible marketing facilitates corporations, including universities, in building a positive brand image and ultimately increases their visibility and profitability (DeWitt and Dahlin, 2009). As a collectivist society, the Chinese value interdependence and an individual's responsibility to society to the extent that one's identity is constructed on the basis of the social system (Albers-Miller and Gelb, 1996). This accounts for the universities' emphasis on nurturing local talent as a means

of contributing to the country's success. This strong sense of social responsibility is counterbalanced by the imperative to look outwards in pursuit of a global outlook and cosmopolitan identity, which quite often takes the form of international partnerships and collaborative enterprises and an overt subscription to entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

By deconstructing the move structure and probing into the interdiscursive nature of the PMs of top-ranked Chinese universities, this study has produced insights into the marketization of higher education in China. The PMs represent the coalescence of heterogeneous ideologies being pulled together and merged. The confluence of global centrifugal and local centripetal forces that have structurally shaped and constituted the discursive (re)construction of universities in mainland China can be construed as 'glocalization' (Robertson, 1994), a term recontextualized in this study to describe the Chinese universities as concurrently embracing the global market-driven values while upholding a national instrumentalist ideology. The local forces of manipulation appear, at least for the moment, more potent than global market forces, as the nation is still the powerful agency that determines educational policies and shapes educational development (Mok, 2000). Moreover, the globalization and marketization predilections in the PMs examined and exposed in this study can ultimately be traced back to the

Chinese central government's push for their top universities to attain a global standing and international recognition through schemes such as the 'Double Top University Plan'. The interplay between socio-political and socio-economic imperatives at both global and local levels have created a somewhat unique, dynamic, complex and conflictual discursive space in China's higher education that elite universities have to carefully navigate and negotiate. This is also what the presidents, as incumbents or political appointees in a highly structured and hierarchical bureaucracy that demands unequivocal loyalty to the central government and the universities they preside over, must grapple with.

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Appendix 1. The 36 top-ranked Chinese universities examined in the study

Rank	University	QS Ranking	THE Ranking	Averaged Ranking
1	Tsinghua University (THU) 清华大学	25	30	28
2	Peking University (PKU) 北京大学	38	27	33
3	Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) 上海交通大学	62	188	125
4	Zhejiang University (ZJU) 浙江大学	87	177	132
5	Nanjing University (NJU) 南京大学	114	169	142
6	Beijing Normal University (BNU) 北京师范大学	256	Nil	256
7	Nankai University (NKU) 南开大学	344	Nil	344
8	Sun Yat-Sen University (SYSU) 中山大学	319	351-400	347
9	Xiamen University (XMU) 厦门大学	431-440	401-500	443
10	Xi'an Jiaotong University (XJTU) 西安交通大学	344	501-600	447
11	Huazhong University of Science and Technology (HUST) 华中科技大学	471-480	401-500	463
12	Tianjin University (TJU) 天津大学	471-480	Nil	475
13	Renmin University of China (RUC) 中国人民大学	481-490	501-600	518
	Shanghai University (SHU) 上海大学	421-430	601-800	518
	Shandong University (SDU) 山东大学	551-600	501-600	518
	South China University of Technology (SCUT) 华南理工大学	551-600	501-600	518
17	Soochow University (SCU) 苏州大学	Nil	501-600	550

18	University of Electronic Science and Technology of China (UESTC) 电子科技大学	551-600	Nil	575
19	Lanzhou University (LZU) 兰州大学	601-650	Nil	625
20	University of Science and Technology Beijing (USTB) 北京科技大学	551-600	601-800	638
	Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics (BUAA) 北京航空航天大学	551-600	601-800	638
	East China University of Science and Technology (ECUST) 华东理工大学	551-600	601-800	638
23	Nanjing Agricultural University (NAU) 南京农业大学	Nil	601-800	700
	Huazhong Agricultural University (HZAU) 华中农业大学	Nil	601-800	700
	China University of Geosciences, Wuhan (CUG) 中国地质大学（武汉）	Nil	601-800	700
	Northwestern Polytechnical University (NPU) 西北工业大学	Nil	601-800	700
	Nanjing Medical University (NMU) 南京医科大学	Nil	601-800	700
28	Jilin University (JLU) 吉林大学	Nil	801-1000	900
	Jinan University (JNU) 暨南大学	Nil	801-1000	900
	Jiangsu University (JSU) 江苏大学	Nil	801-1000	900
	Huaqiao University (HQU) 华侨大学	Nil	801-1000	900
	Northwest A&F University (NWAUFU) 西北农林科技大学	Nil	801-1000	900
	Ocean University of China (OUC) 中国海洋大学	Nil	801-1000	900
	Wuhan University of Technology (WUT) 武汉理工大学	Nil	801-1000	900
	China University of Petroleum, Beijing (CUPB) 中国石油大学（北京）	Nil	801-1000	900

36	Southwest Jiaotong University (SWJTU) 西南交通大学	Nil	1001+	1001
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Appendix 2. Example of rhetorical move analysis of a president's message

President's Message [NWAUFU]	Rhetorical Moves
Greetings and Welcome to Northwest A&F University, one of China's "Project 985" universities.	Welcoming Remark
Founded in 1934 as the National Northwest College of Agriculture and Forestry, NWAUFU is defined with the mission of serving the nation for its needs, serving the people for their living and persisting science for its truth.	Mission Statement
Historically, the University has contributed significantly to China's agricultural development, and is grounded in one important task – agricultural research in arid and semi-arid areas. We are currently working collaboratively on the challenging goal of building the University to world-class agricultural university by the year 2034 through our incomparable commitments in food security, food safety, ecological security, and regional development.	University Profile: highlighting social responsibility
Cultivating high-achieving students and striving for academic excellence is NWAUFU's core principle and permanent pursuit. With the economy increasingly globalized and diverse cultures progressively integrated, we are committed to the engagement with internationally recognized institutions in a bid to develop students with creative thinking and global perspective.	University Profile: highlighting academic strength and global outlook
We will work concurrently to help promote the progress of China's agriculture modernization drive, social development and agriculture research in arid areas. The university is unique for its independent thinking, sense of responsibility and innovative pursuit of truth. I am honored and privileged to be part of this excellent academic community.	Future Aspiration
As president, I sincerely welcome aspiring students and accomplished scholars to join us to make NWAUFU even greater.	Closing Remark
Sincerely Wu Pute	Signature or Name

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