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Chinese management academics’ English-medium scholarly experience: Comparative perspectives on overseas- trained and home-trained scholars

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Abstract

In this paper we report a study which was aimed to find out how overseas-trained Chinese management academics (CMAs) compare with their home-trained counterparts in English-medium scholarly experience. Our data were drawn from a web-based questionnaire distributed following the conclusion of the biennial conference of the International Association for Chinese Management Research (IACMR) held in 2014, the part of the conference program which featured English sessions, e-mail interviews with some questionnaire respondents, and observation at the conference site. Our findings comparatively illustrate the English-medium scholarly experience of the two cohorts of CMAs in terms of their participation in the English presentation sessions of IACMR2014, their use of English as university academics, and the relationship between English/Chinese-medium research productivity and self-perceived English abilities. Our study highlights heterogeneity among different groups of English as an Additional Language (EAL) scholars and calls for more contextualized investigation of the diverse experiences of EAL scholars across countries and disciplines in this English-dominant academic world.

Keywords: Chinese scholars, management academics, returnee scholars, using English at international conferences, writing for publication in English.

Resumen

El uso del inglés como lengua académica en el ámbito de las ciencias empresariales en China: Una perspectiva comparativa de los profesores con formación internacional y aquellos con formación nacional

En este artículo se presenta un estudio que buscaba explorar comparativamente la experiencia académica de los profesores del ámbito de las ciencias empresariales en China con formación internacionalmente con la de aquellos con formación únicamente nacional. Nuestros datos se obtuvieron a partir de un cuestionario online distribuido después del congreso bianual de la Asociación Internacional de Investigación en Ciencias Empresariales en China (IACMR por sus siglas en inglés), celebrado en 2014, de las sesiones del congresos en las que se presentaron ponencias en inglés, de las entrevistas por e-mail a algunos de los participantes en el cuestionario y de la observaciones in situ durante el congreso. Nuestros resultados ilustran de manera comparativa la experiencia de dos grupos de profesores del ámbito de las ciencias empresariales en términos de su participación en las sesiones con presentaciones en inglés en el congreso IACMR2014, su uso del English en las actividades académicas en la universidad, y las relaciones entre la productividad investigadora en las que se emplea el inglés o el chino y la auto-percepción sobre la destreza lingüística en inglés. Nuestro estudio señala la heterogeneidad entre los diferentes grupos de académicos que usan el Inglés como Lengua Adicional (ILA) y propone la necesidad de una investigación más contextualizada de las diversas experiencias de los académicos que usan ILA en la comunicación académica en diferentes países y disciplinas en un mundo académico marcado por el uso dominante del inglés.

Palabras clave: académicos chinos, académicos del ámbito de las ciencias empresariales, el inglés en conferencias internacionales, el inglés para la publicación científica.

1. Introduction

This paper reports an exploratory study aimed to compare the English-medium scholarly experience of overseas-trained Chinese scholars with their home-trained counterparts, focusing on the case of Chinese management academics (CMAs) working in Chinese universities. In our definition, “overseas-trained” academics are those academics who have typically received a doctoral degree (or less often, a Master’s degree, or both Master’s and doctoral degrees) outside mainland China, while the “home-trained” are those who have received their Master’s and doctoral degrees in mainland China.¹ In focusing on the discipline of management, a social science which

displays strong North American dominance in knowledge production (Legge, 2001; Tietze, 2008; Li, 2014) and whose development tends to be closely tied to the economic path of a country, our study highlights the overall appeal of English-medium knowledge construction to the management academics in an emerging economy (i.e., China, by which we mean mainland China in this paper) and at the same time their varying accomplishment in the endeavor.

The social sciences in China have not marched at an equal pace toward internationalizing their scholarship profiles; the disciplines housed in the business schools including the discipline of management have, however, stood out (Jonkers, 2010). China's status as an emerging economy has apparently provided a fertile ground for management and economics research, so that, unsurprisingly, "economics and business management" tops the list in a scientometric study of papers listed in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) that were produced by Chinese universities between 1978 and 2007 across disciplines (Liu & Liu, 2009). More specifically, the numbers of SSCI-indexed management papers that included Chinese authors in 2010, 2012, and 2014 were 119, 225, and 354 respectively (ISTIC, 2011, 2013, 2015). Overseas-trained returnee academics at Chinese business schools, for whom English-medium publication in indexed journals is typically linked to tenure and promotion (Li, 2014; Li & Yang, 2017 forthcoming), have crucially contributed to the rising numbers. Indeed, against the backdrop of China's booming economy, management has been among the most popular disciplines that Chinese students study overseas, and also one of the disciplines hosting the largest numbers of returnees in recent years (Ministry of Education of PRC, 2012). The increase of the population of returnee academics in China in the past decade has been closely tied to China's pursuit of "world-class" universities, a trend also found in other Asian societies and European countries (Mok, 2007; Deem et al., 2008). Incentive schemes have been implemented at national, provincial, and university levels to attract overseas-trained Chinese scholars (Zweig, 2006; Wells, 2007; Qiu, 2009), who are considered "an important driver for the increase in productivity and quality of the Chinese research effort" (Jonkers & Tijssen, 2008: 310).

At the same time, the younger generations of home-trained CMAs have also sought and gained opportunities of participation and scholarly exchange at the international level, in particular through short-term attachment to or study at overseas universities as visiting scholars or exchange students, joint

publication with overseas scholars, and attendance of international conferences held overseas and in China. The International Association for Chinese Management Research (IACMR), established in 2002 and nurtured by some prominent overseas-based and returned Chinese management scholars, has played a pivotal role in bridging the Chinese community of management academics to the outside world. In our study we capitalized on the opportunity offered by a recent IACMR biennial international conference to access a group of overseas-trained and home-trained CMAs to explore their English-medium scholarly experience.

In the following we will first review literature relevant to our study. This will be followed by a description of our research methods, elaboration of our findings, and a discussion of the findings. In the conclusion section we will outline some limitations of the study, suggest directions for future research, and end on a note highlighting the value of individual competence in academic English for non-Anglophone scholars to participate actively in the processes of knowledge construction and dissemination.

2. Literature review

Previous discussions and research revolving around English as an Additional Language (EAL) scholars have informed our study. On the one hand, non-Anglophones' "communicative handicaps" in English ([Ammon, 2013: 1928](#)) or their "struggle with the English language burden" ([Benfield & Feak, 2006: 1728](#)) has long been acknowledged. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that the native-nonnative divide may not hold as the right framing for EAL scholars' disadvantages not only because heterogeneity exists among individuals in terms of expertise in English academic writing and publication, but also because publication experience, academic seniority, facility with the research article genre, etc. have a stake in one's endeavor ([Swales, 2004](#); [Belcher, 2009](#); [Ferguson et al., 2011](#); [Hyland, 2015](#)). Non-Anglophone scholars also assess their English abilities differently, as revealed in a series of survey-based studies conducted in Europe and elsewhere. They have often expressed confidence in reading and, sometimes, listening skills in academic English ([Olsson & Sheridan, 2012](#); [Burgess et al., 2014](#)); writing is more challenging ([Pérez-Llantada et al., 2011](#); [Riazi, 2012](#); [Hanauer & Englander, 2013](#); [Burgess et al., 2014](#)); and linguistic inadequacy in speaking is widely recognized – so that the chance of engaging in sophisticated

discussions and debates at international conferences is curtailed (Ventola et al., 2002; Pérez-Llantada et al., 2011; [Olsson & Sheridan, 2012](#)). Understandably, it has also been found that a non-Anglophone scholar's self-reported English proficiency strongly signals the kinds of attitudes he/she might hold toward the dominance of English, so that more robust proficiency tends to be accompanied by more active participation in the Englishization trend (Ferguson et al., 2011).

Several studies on EAL scholars have focused on overseas-trained returnees. Casanave (1998) conducted a narrative inquiry into North America-trained young Japanese scholars' transition experience in Japan. Flowerdew (2000) reported a likewise North America-trained Hong Kong scholar's case of publishing a paper in an international journal. Shi (2003) interviewed a group of "Western-trained" Chinese TESOL professionals to find out about their perspectives and practices in scholarly publication back in China. Min (2014: 190), based on interviews with a group of applied linguists in Taiwan who were overwhelmingly Western-trained, reported that "language, topic, and perceived bias" were "three major perceived challenges" in publishing in international journals. Beyond applied linguistics research, framed in the discussions of scientific mobility and its impact on the internationalization of scientific research, two studies, namely, Jonkers and Tijssen (2008), and Jonkers and Cruz-Castro (2013), examined respectively returnee Chinese and Argentinian life scientists' research productivity and co-publication behavior. Using bibliometric techniques and academics' international mobility data, the studies showed that foreign experience was linked to academics' propensity to collaborate internationally and publish more articles in high impact journals compared with their non-mobile counterparts. Finally, previous studies featuring Chinese scholars found that compared with their home-trained counterparts, overseas-trained returnee scholars tended to be more motivated and accomplished in English publishing, more actively engaged in international research collaboration, and more inclined to regard their home research system and the former host system as representing separate discourse communities (Zhang & Chen, 2010; Jiang, 2014; [Li, 2014](#); [Ge, 2015](#)).

Previous reports concerning academics in management or business studies are of particular interest to us. Based on an investigation of the experiences of 33 management academics who were non-native speakers of English working in the European higher education sector, Tietze (2008: 378) concluded that "the reach of English is both broad and deep", with "knowledge generation and

dissemination” conducted almost exclusively in English for these academics. Lee and Lee’s (2013) interviews with academic staff at a South Korean university likewise revealed that for a majority of the participants in business, English was the language of academic publishing. By contrast, Burgess et al. (2014: 75), in a large-scale survey of Spanish researchers, noted that Business Studies scholars published in Spanish-medium journals as well, presumably due to the “local focus and applied nature” of the disciplines involved. In an earlier ethnographically-oriented study conducted at a business school in Denmark, Petersen and Shaw (2002: 372) similarly reported a complex picture of language use amongst the school’s academics, influenced by the “demands, norms, and language practices” of the various “international and local academic, international and local professional” communities they participated in. In our own previous research, we have shown how the privileging of publishing in indexed English-medium journals was manifested in institutional texts at high-ranking Chinese business schools (Li & Yang, 2017 forthcoming), how such publication was keenly pursued by a group of mostly overseas-trained CMAs (Li, 2014), and how academic staff at the business school of a Chinese university negotiated the policy of English-medium instruction (Hu & Lei, 2014).

The study to be reported in this paper will add to the literature reviewed above by deepening an understanding of the different trajectories followed by non-Anglophone scholars in their academic pursuits in the English-dominant academy and in the field of management in particular.

3. The study

Our study was guided by the following overarching research question: How do overseas-trained CMAs compare with their home-trained counterparts in terms of English-medium scholarly experience? In the following we will describe our target participants and the methods of data collection and data analysis used in the study.

3.1. Participants

Our target participants were CMAs as defined at the beginning of this paper. Adopting a convenience sampling strategy (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), we approached the CMAs who attended the *Sixth Biennial Conference of the International Association for Chinese Management Research* (henceforth

IACMR2014) held in Beijing, June 18-22, 2014.² The conference had a bilingual policy and included an “English Scholarly Program” (featuring English presentations) and a “Chinese Forum” (for Chinese presentations). According to the “Participant List” shown on its homepage, the conference attracted about 1,090 attendees from universities and research institutes within and outside China. As the online “Participant List” provided the names of the conference attendees and their affiliations, we went through the name list, checked for the webpages of the listed names to exclude overseas-based attendees and full-time students (who do not usually have webpages of their own), and found the e-mail addresses of a total of 401 CMAs, who then became the target population of our questionnaire survey.

With the informed consent of the conference organizers, one of us registered to attend an early part, but not the entire duration, of the conference (due to personal schedule and budget reasons). The registration enabled her to access the conference’s online and print versions of the “English Scholarly Program” and conduct on-site observation. However, the conference organizers did not allow interviews to be conducted or questionnaires distributed at the conference site, unlike, for instance, the case in Burrough-Boenish’s (1999) study.³

3.2. Data collection and data analyses

Four sources of data drawn upon in our study will be described below. In the chronological order of their collection, these sources of data were: the “English Scholarly Program”, observation at the conference site, questionnaire responses, and e-mail interviews.

3.2.1. The “English Scholarly Program”

The “English Scholarly Program” of the conference listed a total of 259 English papers organized into 69 sessions under either the “Papers” or the “Roundtables” section. The Program gave the title of each paper and showed the names of all the authors together with their affiliations (which enabled us to check the authors’ webpages). From the pool we counted the papers which had CMAs as the first author and those which included CMAs as co-authors respectively, to get an idea of the degree of CMAs’ contribution to the English papers as listed authors.

3.2.2. Observation at the conference site

One of us (the first author), who attended an early part of the conference, conducted observation at the conference site. Specifically, she observed a pre-conference orientation session for new members of the association, and several English-medium presentation sessions featuring Chinese presenters (those with affiliations to mainland Chinese universities) on the first two days of the conference, and she took fieldnotes while observing. Although the observation was limited, it provided a useful supplementary source of evidence in our study.

3.2.3. Questionnaire responses

Our questionnaire consisted of six sections, with a total of 26 open and closed questions. Given the focus of this study, three questions eliciting respondents' perceptions of international collaboration were not included in the study. The questionnaire was written in Chinese and was revised based on the advice of a CMA participant in our previous research who checked through the questionnaire before it was mounted to *SurveyMonkey*®.⁴ Two days after the conclusion of the conference, an e-mail invitation with an embedded URL link to the questionnaire was sent to each of the aforementioned 401 CMAs. Excluding a few failed deliveries and bounce-backs, we sent out valid invitations to 394 potential respondents, and 114 (28.9%) of them returned completed questionnaires. Of the 114, 86 were home-trained (having received all their degrees, including a few currently pursuing their PhD, in mainland China), and the remaining 28 were overseas-trained. Of the 28 overseas-trained returnees, 27 had obtained their PhD degree outside mainland China (North America 10, Hong Kong 7, Europe 6, and other countries 4), while another received a Master's degree in North America but a PhD in mainland China.⁵ Six of the 28 overseas-trained scholars had also received their Bachelor's degree overseas, rather than in mainland China.

In this paper we will draw upon the questionnaire data which were elicited by questions asked along the following lines: (a) how many papers they had presented in English at the international conferences attended in the last five years; (b) how many English articles they had published altogether, as sole author and first author, respectively; (c) how many Chinese articles they had published altogether, as sole author and first author, respectively; (d) how they distributed time between academic reading and writing in English and

Chinese, respectively; and (e) how competent they perceived themselves to be in engaging in these six tasks: understanding English presentations, reading English academic publications, writing academic papers in English, making English presentations, engaging in academic discussions with English-speaking colleagues, and communicating in English with academics outside mainland China by e-mail.

Descriptive statistics (i.e., mean scores, standard deviations, frequencies, ranges, and percentages) were computed for the quantitative data yielded by the questionnaire to describe the patterns of responses from the sample. Inferential statistics (i.e., independent-samples *t*-tests, Pearson's correlational analyses, and chi-square tests) were run to determine differences between the home- and overseas-trained CMAs (e.g., in their self-reported English abilities) and to establish associations between factors (e.g., the relationship between English-medium research productivity and self-perceived English abilities). Open-ended comments or elaborations generated by the questionnaire were analyzed using a "descriptive coding" approach (Merriam, 2009: 180).

3.2.4. E-mail interviews

At the end of the questionnaire we invited the respondents to leave their names and e-mail addresses if they were interested in participating in a short e-mail interview at a later stage. Creswell (2012: 219) referred to e-mail interviews as a method which is "useful in collecting qualitative data quickly from a geographically dispersed group of people" and a method which can "promote a conversation between yourself as the researcher and the participants". As our potential participants were busy fellow academics, we did not expect to engage in a "conversation" with them but hoped that exchange via email would serve as an extension to the questionnaire data. We sent an e-mail (in Chinese) to all 34 CMAs who indicated their willingness to be interviewed, inviting comments on their use of English versus Chinese in their academic lives and, if they had presented a paper in English at IACMR2014, comments on their English-medium performance.⁶ The total 12 respondents to our e-mail invitations included three overseas-trained (referred to as O1-O3 henceforth) and nine home-trained (referred to as H1-H9 henceforth) academics. The replies we received ranged from a couple of lines to hundreds of words in length. These replies, like the open-ended comments gathered through the questionnaire, were analyzed by the method of "descriptive coding" (Merriam, 2009: 180).

4. Findings

In the following we will illuminate potential differences between overseas- and home-trained CMAs in terms of English-medium scholarly experience by drawing upon evidence from our data which concerned, respectively, their participation in the English sessions of IACMR2014, their use of English as university academics, and their English/Chinese-medium research productivity and self-perceived English abilities.

4.1. CMAs' participation in the English sessions of IACMR2014

IACMR2014's "English Scholarly Program" indicated that of the total 259 English papers included, 129 papers (49.8%) had CMAs as first authors, with 108 (83.7% of 129) being first-authored by home-trained CMAs and 21 (16.3% of 129) by overseas-trained CMAs (their webpages indicated where they had received their doctoral degree). A total of 48 papers (18.5% of 259) had CMAs as co-authors only. Thus, CMAs had a role in over two-thirds (68.3%) of the English papers and first-authored about half of them.⁷ The number of papers first-authored by home-trained CMAs was about five times more than those first-authored by overseas-trained CMAs. This difference is understandable, as it was likely that of the hundreds of CMAs who attended the conference, the home-trained attendees far outnumbered the overseas-trained attendees, for returnees, after all, presumably make up only a small minority of the total CMA population in China. At the same time, although we could assume that those home-trained CMAs who were listed as the first author of an English session probably had relatively strong English, our observation at the conference seemed to indicate major difficulty (and reluctance) on the part of some home-trained CMAs in presenting in English. They would readily switch to Chinese in the interest of expressing themselves, as demonstrated by the following observation notes taken at a home-trained CMA's presentation session which was supposed to be delivered in English:

Extract 1 (Chinese *pinyin* is used for Chinese utterances, which are italicized, and English translations are shown in round brackets.).

[The PowerPoint slides of the session were in English.]

Presenter: [A slide on "Introduction" was shown on the screen] I will introduce in Chinese. I will introduce the most important [parts] in Chinese, *weile dadao genghao de xiaoguo* (in order to achieve a better effect).

Chair: Sorry, there's foreigner [in the audience].

Presenter: OK, I will introduce in two languages. *Wo geren renwei* ... (I personally think...)

[Started to dash away in Chinese. A few minutes later, a non-Chinese academic, perhaps the only non-Chinese academic in the audience, in the 4th row, went out. No objection could be detected from the Chinese audience against the use of Chinese.]

Presenter: [Referring to a slide of "Hypotheses" together with a pictorial model] *Ta shi* focus on *jixiao* (It/the model focuses on the issue of performance).

[The presenter continued to speak in Chinese from his English-medium slides, till the end of his presentation.]

Chair: [Beginning of the Q & A session] A friend leaves; maybe he cannot understand Chinese. Who cannot understand Chinese? [If there is one,] we will use English. Otherwise, we will use Chinese.

[The Q & A session then went on in Chinese.]

(Observation notes, June 19, 2014)

The extract of observation notes above can lead to several interpretations: that the presenter preferred to present in Chinese, based on his English-medium PowerPoint slides, presumably due to major difficulty in expressing himself in English; that the Chair (also home-trained) wanted to stick to the English-medium requirement, due to the presence of a non-Chinese attendee, but allowed the presentation to carry on in Chinese after the non-Chinese attendee left; that the Chinese audience preferred to hear a Chinese-medium presentation too; and finally, that such a presentation excluded an English-speaking fellow academic.

There were also sessions with a home-trained CMA (presumably a supervisor) listed as the first author of a paper, but it was a graduate student listed as a co-author who presented the paper in English, and the student presenters generally seemed to be quite capable in English-medium presentations. We were not sure if this arrangement was sometimes based on considerations of the presenters' English proficiency; neither did we know to what extent such scenarios occurred overall in the English sessions of the conference. Our observation at the conference thus constituted a reminder that the author/presenter information given in the conference's "English Scholarly Program" needs to be interpreted with caution.

In e-mail interviews we asked participants who had presented a paper in English at IACMR2014 about their use of English during the presentation. An overseas-trained academic with rich experience of English presentations at international conferences reported in an e-mail response to our query: “I could handle the Q & A session [well] and my audience and I enjoyed good communication” (O2; e-mail in English). Another overseas-trained academic likewise said: “I used only English in my presentation” and “the Q & A session went on well with English as the language” (O3; e-mail in English). By contrast, a few home-trained CMAs reported that the presentation part went fine, but “there was more difficulty during interactive communication; I needed to use some Chinese and body language to facilitate communication”, as H9 put it (e-mail in Chinese). Another home-trained CMA who also gave an English presentation at the conference seemed to be more confident: “I think making a presentation based on English is not a question, though there could be some minor mistakes” (H7; e-mail in English). When responding to our follow-up comment that “from an outsider’s point of view, effective communication at the discussion/Q & A session would require relatively strong English skills on the part of both the speaker and the audience”, the same respondent emphasized the primacy of subject knowledge in facilitating one’s comprehension of a talk:

The diffusion of specific knowledge not requires* you to full* understand all the word*, but to understand the meaning of the word or sentence need* you to have certain heuristic thinking skills,* a macro schema or schemata helps you to understand the knowledge,* it is experience based. So if you have certain knowledge in those research areas, you may able to* catch others* key points at once, and the keywords help you to understand the question in brief. (H7; e-mail in English; more obvious errors in the text marked out with *)

We would of course agree with H7 when the focus is on receptive skills. As the above quote in English attests, grammatical issues may not affect the communication of meaning. Yet it would be fair to suggest that faulty grammar, wording, or sentence structures can sometimes cause difficulty in comprehension and lead to miscommunication or misunderstanding.

4.2. Using English as university academics

The questionnaire asked the respondents to indicate the percentage of time they spent on academic reading and writing in Chinese versus English. A

paired-samples *t*-test did not find a significant difference for the 86 home-trained CMAs, $t(85) = 0.080$, $p = .936$, $d = .009$, indicating that the time spent by the home-trained CMAs as a group on reading and writing in Chinese ($M = 50.21\%$, $SD = 24.11$) did not differ significantly from the time spent on reading and writing in English ($M = 49.79\%$, $SD = 24.11$). However, a second paired-samples *t*-test revealed a significant difference for the 28 overseas-trained CMAs, $t(27) = -3.334$, $p = .002$, $d = .630$, with markedly less time spent on reading and writing in Chinese ($M = 33.21\%$, $SD = 26.64$) than in English ($M = 66.79\%$; $SD = 26.64$). Furthermore, an independent-samples *t*-test found that the home-trained CMAs spent significantly more time than their overseas-trained counterparts on reading and writing in Chinese, $t(112) = 3.156$, $p = .002$, $d = .670$. Conversely, the overseas-trained CMAs expended significantly more time than their home-trained counterparts on reading and writing in English. Returnee CMAs' focus on English-medium reading and writing has also been revealed in our earlier study (Li, 2014).

The questionnaire data presented above lumped together the time investment on reading and on writing. Our follow-up e-mail interviews indicated that home-trained CMAs, though predominantly using Chinese in teaching and writing, did read primarily in English. In response to our email question "Could you tell us about your use of English and Chinese in teaching and research?", the home-trained respondents reported that they primarily taught in Chinese, with the exceptions of H5, who taught one Master's course in English, and H4, who used English in a "bilingual" course, that is, lecturing in Chinese but using English-dominant materials (see Hu & Lei, 2014). In home-trained CMAs' Chinese-dominant teaching, use of English ranged from providing useful specialist English vocabulary or English references on PowerPoint slides (H1, H3, and H8), to "using a large amount of English resources" in preparing lessons (overseas universities' syllabi, websites, PowerPoint slides, videos, "classic" case studies, etc.) while mixing Chinese and English in the course outline (H9).

Compared with these home-trained CMAs' limited use of English in teaching, the only overseas-trained academic who responded to the same e-mail interview questions mentioned above, O1, reported active engagement with English: that he taught a "bilingual" course to an undergraduate "international class" as well as an MBA Business English course, and that his "academic exchange" activities included "attending and presenting at one to three international conferences every year, organizing one to two

international symposiums, inviting overseas experts to visit our university, and participating in the university's international exchange activities" (e-mail in Chinese).

While their teaching was Chinese-dominant, the home-trained CMAs we interviewed by e-mail unanimously reported that for research they read and utilized primarily English literature and resources (for example, academic journal articles, working papers, papers for practitioners, news, and videos). Reading of Chinese literature was secondary but necessary, given that paper submissions were primarily targeted at Chinese journals. One explained:

I mainly use English references; but will look for content about China or other developing countries to enlighten myself. After the larger framework and line of thinking have been formed, I will search for Chinese references, to see if similar or same scenarios have been reported. (H9; e-mail in Chinese)

Experience in English writing varied among the home-trained, from writing only abstracts in English to English papers; and producing an English text by translating a Chinese text into English seems common. Responding to our e-mail interview question "When writing in English what strategies have you adopted to overcome potential difficulties?", the respondents said that translation was done with the assistance of tools such as Google (H8) or Youdao (electronic dictionary; <http://dict.youdao.com>) (H3), which was then followed up with careful modification of grammar. In addition, modeling after published English papers and replacing keywords appeared to be an important strategy (H4, H8, and H9). As H8 reported, "So far I usually write in English by modifying sentences in journal articles, or write a sentence based on some Chinese meaning first and then look for similar English sentences to modify it" (e-mail in Chinese).

4.3. English/Chinese-medium research productivity and self-perceived English abilities

To find out how the overseas-trained CMAs compared with their home-trained counterparts in their English- and Chinese-medium research productivity, we ran a number of independent-samples *t*-tests on the questionnaire data on the numbers of English papers published in total, sole-, and first-authored by them, the numbers of English presentations they had given in the past five years at international conferences held in China or

overseas, and the numbers of Chinese papers published in total, sole-, and first-authored by them. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics as well as the results of the *t*-tests.

Research productivity	Overseas-trained		Home-trained		<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> (2-tailed)	<i>d</i>
	(n = 28)		(n = 86)					
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Total No. of published EPs	8.14	5.88	3.44	3.48	33.37 ^a	4.008	.000	1.004
No. of sole-authored EPs	1.14	3.19	0.38	0.98	28.69 ^a	1.239	.225	.363
No. of first-authored EPs	4.11	3.51	2.09	2.35	35.21 ^a	2.836	.008	.686
No. of English presentations	6.75	5.45	2.76	3.19	33.23 ^a	3.680	.001	.925
Total No. of published CPs	7.46	6.81	20.94	20.13	111.78 ^a	-5.342	.000	1.001
No. of sole-authored CPs	2.86	5.35	4.38	6.31	112.00	-1.152	.252	0.262
No. of first-authored CPs	5.29	5.93	13.79	13.55	102.68 ^a	-4.620	.000	0.873

Note. EP = English papers; CP = Chinese papers

^aDegrees of freedom were corrected for unequal variances of the two groups

Table 1. Results of independent-samples *t*-tests comparing overseas- and home-trained CMAs.

On average, compared with their home-trained counterparts, the overseas-trained CMAs published significantly more English papers and first-authored English papers, but fewer Chinese papers and first-authored Chinese papers. The overseas-trained scholars also delivered significantly more presentations in English than their home-trained counterparts in the past five years. The larger mean number of first-authored English publications by the overseas-trained scholars would indicate that they were more likely than their home-trained colleagues to play a leading role when co-authoring papers, for example, by being the principal investigator of a project and playing a major role in the writing for publication process (see also [Li, 2014](#)). The relatively small numbers of sole-authored English publications for both groups would suggest that joint publications may be the norm in the discipline of management, although the overseas-trained scholars' advantage in the number (three times that of the home-trained) seemed to testify to their greater capacity for independence in writing for publication in English, presumably partly due to their stronger English abilities. Conversely, the home-trained CMAs' stronger Chinese abilities than their English ones, as well as their significantly more time investment in reading and writing in Chinese than their overseas-trained counterparts, appeared to have contributed to their greater Chinese-medium research productivity.

To gauge the questionnaire respondents’ competence to use English for academic communication, we asked them to self-assess their English ability to perform six tasks on an 8-point Likert scale anchored in *unable to do so* and *as competent as in Chinese*. Table 2 summarizes the mean scores and standard deviations for these abilities as well as an overall English proficiency measure averaged over the six types of ability.

Type of English ability	M	SD
Listening: attending seminars/presentations	5.18	1.87
Reading journal articles and books	6.38	1.22
Writing academic papers	5.05	1.62
Presenting papers at conferences/seminars	4.99	1.93
Discussing academic issues orally with English-speaking colleagues	4.87	2.02
Writing e-mails to academic colleagues outside mainland China	5.88	1.60
Overall perceived proficiency	5.39	1.51

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for self-assessments of different English abilities (N = 114).

A repeated-measures one-way ANOVA (with the Greenhouse-Geisser correction) found significant differences in the respondents’ self-assessment of the different English abilities, $F(5, 565) = 48.12, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .299$. *Post hoc* pairwise comparisons with the Bonferroni method indicated that as a group the 114 respondents’ perceived English reading ability was significantly higher than that of the other five types of proficiency; that their self-reported ability to communicate with overseas scholars by e-mail was the second highest perceived competence and was significantly higher than the remaining four types of English ability; and that their perceived listening ability was significantly higher than their perceived ability to discuss in English.

We also ran independent-samples *t*-tests to see if the overseas- and home-trained CMAs differed in their self-assessments of English abilities. The statistical results are presented in Table 3.

Type of English ability	Overseas-trained (n = 28)		Home-trained (n = 86)		df	t	p (2-tailed)	d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Listening	6.96	0.84	4.59	1.75	96.15 ^a	9.642	.000	1.836
Reading	7.00	0.72	6.17	1.29	83.51 ^a	4.251	.000	0.824
Writing	6.61	0.99	4.55	1.46	67.67 ^a	8.406	.000	1.679
Presenting papers	6.71	1.05	4.43	1.81	80.73 ^a	8.205	.000	1.597
Discussing issues orally	6.71	0.98	4.27	1.91	91.09 ^a	8.860	.000	1.698
Writing English e-mails	7.00	0.90	5.51	1.61	83.68 ^a	6.107	.000	1.182

^aDegrees of freedom were corrected for unequal variances of the two groups

Table 3. Results of independent-samples *t*-tests comparing overseas- and home-trained CMAs.

As expected, the overseas-trained CMAs' self-evaluations were significantly higher than those of the home-trained CMAs for all six types of English abilities, and the effect sizes indicated that the differences were all remarkable. These quantitative findings were supported by the e-mail interview data. An overseas-trained respondent, for example, told us: "I should say on the whole I am able to use English with relative ease in writing and communication; but I still need to expand my knowledge of specialist vocabulary" (O1; e-mail in Chinese). By contrast, a home-trained respondent spoke of his language barrier: "I have no big problem in reading English literature [...], but speaking, communication, and writing [in English] is the major barrier for me. I cannot comprehend the presentations at academic conferences" (H1; e-mail in Chinese).

To explore the relationship between English proficiency and English/Chinese-medium research productivity, we conducted Pearson's correlational analyses on the questionnaire respondents' self-perceived English abilities and research output in English and Chinese. As can be seen in Table 4, all six types of self-assessed English abilities and the overall English proficiency were significantly positively correlated with the number of English presentations in the past five years, and the number of English papers published. The correlations were very strong in the case of English listening ability, writing ability, ability to discuss in English, ability to present in English, and overall proficiency in English. In addition, with the exception of perceived reading ability, all measures of English abilities were also significantly positively correlated with the number of first-authored English papers. These results echo what we suggested above: that overseas-trained scholars' stronger English abilities facilitated an active role in joint authorship and thus enhanced their chance to become the first author.

Type of English ability	No. of EPrs last 5 years	No. of EPs (total)	No. of EPs (Sole author)	No. of EPs (1 st author)	No. of CPs (total)	No. of CPs (Sole author)	No. of CPs (1 st author)
Listening	.494***	.379***	.051	.255**	-.189*	-.061	-.163
Reading	.255**	.233**	-.050	.131	-.080	-.150	-.042
Writing	.432***	.452***	.101	.367***	-.162	-.087	-.189*
Presenting papers	.514***	.411***	.050	.296***	-.142	-.102	-.136
Discussing issues orally	.492***	.409***	.045	.270**	-.136	-.070	-.135
Writing English e-mails	.393***	.343***	.031	.190*	-.137	-.099	-.155
Overall proficiency	.502***	.429***	.037	.292**	-.163	-.103	-.159

Note. EPr = English presentations; EP = English papers; CP = Chinese papers
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4. Correlations among English abilities and English/Chinese-medium research output.

Interestingly, self-perceived English listening ability was significantly negatively correlated with the number of Chinese papers published, and perceived English writing ability was significantly negatively correlated with the number of first-authored Chinese papers published. This suggests that the more confident CMAs are in their English writing ability, the less likely they will be actively writing Chinese papers (but, instead, will be devoted to English writing), a scenario that would usually reflect the case of overseas-trained scholars. Confidence in English listening ability could imply a greater chance of participating in English-medium academic activities (such as lectures and international conferences). It is perhaps not surprising that someone of this proficiency profile – typically an overseas-trained scholar – may have a reduced interest in writing Chinese papers.

Our e-mail interviews offered additional evidence for the overall tendency of overseas-trained CMAs preferring to write in English and their home-trained counterparts more often writing in Chinese. Perceived (and actual) English abilities seemed to be an important leveraging factor. Two home-trained scholars observed on their greater difficulty and ineffectiveness in English writing when compared with writing in Chinese. H1 said: “If I write in Chinese, it will be clearer and more thorough; but when translating into English, I feel the meaning is not accurately expressed sometimes” (e-mail in Chinese). H9 reflected: “When writing (in English), I feel like doing math, and cannot experience the sense of satisfaction felt when writing in Chinese” (e-mail in Chinese).

5. Discussion

In the foregoing section, we drew upon multiple sources of data to detail the English-medium scholarly experience of two cohorts of CMAs, the overseas-trained and the home-trained. Evidence from our observation at the conference and from our follow-up e-mail interviews with some participants showed that home-trained academics were likely to struggle to express themselves when trying to present in English and would switch to Chinese if allowed; whereas oversea-trained academics tended to be able to present in English and conduct oral discussion (during Q & A) more effectively, presumably due to their stronger English skills. The English barrier highlighted in the study as faced by home-trained CMAs in spoken communication echoes reports on European scholars in the

literature (Ventola et al., 2002; Pérez-Llantada et al., 2011; [Olsson & Sheridan, 2012](#)).

We also found that overseas-trained CMAs devoted a significantly greater percentage of their time to reading and writing in English than their home-trained peers. The latter apparently mostly read English literature but wrote primarily in Chinese, and when writing in English, might rely on translating from Chinese texts by using electronic dictionaries, or modeling after sentences in the literature. Such coping strategies are similar to those that Tietze (2008: 382) reported as adopted by many of her respondents – European management academics – “in the early stages of their careers”. In terms of translating from Chinese texts to produce English texts, it should be noted that our home-trained e-mail interviewees seemed to be referring to translation from Chinese on their own (as also mentioned by, for example, St John, 1987, and Pérez-Llantada et al., 2011), rather than using translation services as reported of Spanish humanities and social science scholars (Burgess et al., 2014; Martín et al., 2014). Preference for translating on one’s own rather than using professional translation services could bear upon issues of cost ([Olsson & Sheridan, 2012](#)) and access (Burgess et al., 2014); it could also indicate that one considers one’s English adequate, though not necessarily satisfactory (as our respondents indicated), for the purpose. Apart from research, it seems overseas-trained CMAs also tended to use English in teaching by a much larger measure than their home-trained peers, which is perhaps not surprising, as the overseas-trained would be expected to help to fulfill their schools’ goal of “bilingual teaching” and to assist in their universities’ international academic exchange activities ([Hu & Lei, 2014](#)).

The overseas-trained CMAs displayed stronger confidence in their English abilities than their home-trained peers and, at the same time, achieved a significantly higher level of English-medium research productivity in terms of English-medium publications and presentations at international conferences. The findings indicate that English proficiency facilitates active participation in English-medium scholarly activities (Ferguson et al., 2011), whereas lack of competence in the language can create “communicative handicaps” for EAL academics ([Ammon, 2013: 1928](#); Hanauer & Englander, 2013). Apparently, the overseas-trained CMAs have chosen to favor publishing and presenting papers in English, rather than in Chinese. This echoes Tietze’s (2008) report on her European management academics and Lee and Lee’s (2013) report on South Korean business academics putting a premium on English-medium publication. A more complex picture of our

CMA participants' choices between English and Chinese could be revealed through the use of other research methods, such as an extended survey (Burgess et al., 2014) or an ethnographic study (Peterson & Shaw, 2002). Yet it would be fair to suggest that the overseas-trained CMAs (and increasingly, the younger generation of home-trained CMAs) are keen to disseminate their work in English (see [Li, 2014](#)), and international collaboration plays a key role in this endeavor (see [Zhai et al., 2014](#)).

6. Conclusion

Some limitations of the study reported in this paper should be acknowledged. Firstly, a convenience sampling strategy (i.e., sampling CMAs attending an academic international conference held in China) was adopted in our study, and the 114 respondents to our questionnaire were also self-selected – presumably for them the issue of our focus in the questionnaire (“English for academic communication”, as indicated in the invitation e-mail and the title of the questionnaire) was particularly relevant. Thus we cannot claim that the picture we presented in this paper is representative of the larger population of overseas-trained and home-trained management academics in mainland China.

Secondly, although on-site data collection through a questionnaire or interviews was not allowed (we felt some on-site interviews would have been a particularly useful source of data for our study), if more systematic on-site observations had been conducted, richer data could have been gathered. Needless to say, observation needs to be systematically conducted to stand as a solid source of data. Thirdly, we also wished that our e-mail interviews had received elaborated responses from a greater number of target respondents. The regretful gap of time between our questionnaire survey and the follow-up e-mail interviews (as a result of our other commitments as busy academics) could have contributed to the low numbers of the responses we received. As EAP researchers we face challenges in juggling between the constraints of logistics and resources and efforts to penetrate the disciplinary communities that are not our own. On the other hand, the current performative pressure on academics in general perhaps does not encourage them to be generous with their time in rendering support to the kind of research conducted by fellow academics typically from the discipline of (language) education. In [Li \(2015\)](#), which analyzed possible constraints

faced by (language) education researchers in accessing fellow academics as research participants, we emphasized “reciprocity” (Shenton & Hayter, 2004) as an important principle to operate on in our endeavor to reach out to academics across disciplines, that is, giving something back in return – editing manuscripts for them might be an example. We also suggested honorarium payment (in a token amount) – if it is culturally appropriate – as a possible means of compensating participants, especially when “reciprocity” is hard to be implemented. We pointed out, however, that as EAP researchers seeking to access other “academic tribes” (Becher & Trowler, 2001), ultimately, we do heavily rely on fellow academics’ collegiality in the spirit of “academic citizenship” (Macfarlane, 2005) for recruiting them as our research participants.

The study reported in this paper should inspire future research. Above all, it is important to point out that while focusing on uncovering and illuminating differences between the overseas-trained returnee CMAs and their home-trained colleagues, we do not mean to polarize the two groups of academics or suggest within-group homogeneity. Clearly, wide differences would exist within each group. Among the returned scholars, the English burden may be greater for some than for others (Li, 2014; Min, 2014) and perhaps their English-speaking co-authors still play an indispensable role in ensuring the quality of language. Likewise, individual home-trained scholars may also display relatively high levels of English competence and aspiration for international participation, and their “situated learning” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) gained through participation in international collaboration, overseas exchanges, and other English-medium professional activities will accumulate over time, leading to increments in their “scientific social and human capital” (Jonkers & Tijssen, 2008: 313) and thus reducing the gap between them and the overseas-trained. In the spirit of acknowledging the existence of diversity, possible similarities and differences between EAL scholars of different backgrounds in terms of the kinds of linguistic and non-linguistic challenges encountered, strategies adopted, patterns of research collaboration, and learning trajectories are worth exploring. More specifically, to follow up on the focus of the present paper, the extent to which and the ways in which overseas- and home-trained scholars collaborate with each other so that they together contribute to the development of their institution and discipline (apart from advancing their own academic careers) would be an issue yet to study. Overall, from a methodological point of view, there is a need for EAP researchers’

continued efforts to use a wide range of research methods and data sources (for example, data obtained through surveys, ethnographic approaches, and text analytic research) to investigate non-Anglophone academics' process of participating in English-medium scholarly activities in varied cultural, disciplinary, and professional contexts.

In summary, in this paper we reported a study comparing the English-medium scholarly experience of a sample of overseas- and home-trained academics in one discipline (management) in the context of mainland China. We showed that the former group of academics were more actively engaged in English-medium academic communication than the latter group. While highlighting the English language barrier faced by the home-trained academics, we acknowledge that one may prioritize the conveyance/comprehension of meaning over accuracy and idiomaticity in communication in English (as one respondent to our e-mail interview, H7, did), thus in effect echoing the voices that “argue for a shift to English as an International Language (EIL) as a lingua franca variety for participating in a growing global community” (Martín et al., 2014: 65), with greater tolerance for non-Anglophone varieties (Horner et al., 2011; [Ammon, 2012](#)). We would support the argument for using EIL as a lingua franca variety for the purpose. However, we believe it is a highly worthwhile investment for EAL academics who aspire for knowledge contribution to the English-dominant academy to continuously work to enhance individual competence in academic English ([Tietze, 2008](#)), despite the decisive role of collective competence ([Lillis & Curry, 2006](#); [Canagarajah, 2016](#)) when it comes to English-medium joint publication. This is because English language skills are significant for EAL academics' active participation in the knowledge production and dissemination processes, with international conferences being an increasingly important venue for such processes.

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NOTES

¹ Our definition of the overseas-trained versus the home-trained, primarily based on where the doctorate was received, largely follows how the two categories are commonly conceptualized in mainland China. The job advertisements of many business schools in China, for example, tend to express preferences for "overseas talents", a prototypical overseas talent being someone who "has received PhD from an overseas well-known university", and better still, has a track record of publishing in indexed, prestigious English-medium journals (Li & Yang, 2017 forthcoming). Only a small minority of the overseas-trained academics in China have also received their undergraduate training overseas (perhaps partly because those who studied overseas since the undergraduate years are less likely to return to China).

² See the conference website at <http://www.iacmr.org/v2en/Detail.aspx?id=313>.

³ The conference organizers informed us that they followed the code of the U.S.-based Academy of Management which bars data collection on site at conferences.

⁴ Although our *SurveyMonkey*® questionnaire (in Chinese) still exists online, to turn it into a "Share" mode requires payment. We will be happy to share an English version of the questionnaire if such a request is received from any reader.

⁵ In our analysis we have put the respondent who received a Master's overseas but a PhD in mainland China in the group of the overseas-trained. We assumed that the Master's study overseas would also have an impact on an academic's attitude toward and self-perceived ability of using English for academic communication.

⁶ The e-mails were sent in late December 2014, that is, about six months after we conducted the questionnaire survey. The undesirable delay was entirely due to our hectic schedules in the months following the questionnaire survey. Upon receiving a respondent's initial reply to our e-mail, usually multiple e-mail exchanges were then conducted between the first author and the respondent, with the former seeking clarification or elaboration from the latter.

⁷ Many of the English papers included non-Chinese scholars as co-authors, indicating the importance of international research collaboration for CMAs, an issue that fell out of the focus of the present study. See Zhai et al. (2014) for a scientometric study of CMAs' international collaboration patterns.