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van

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*Exploring cultural differences in research
misconduct: A transcultural study of China
and Flanders*

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ABSTRACT

Research misconduct is a serious issue in science. There have been many discussions over its causes, such as individual personalities, publishing pressures, and the absence of policies and training programs to deal with this issue. The development of this issue globally raises the question of whether there are cultural differences in research misconduct. What makes certain research practices acceptable or not, or what is ethically responsible research, is probably not universally the same. Cultural differences may have an impact on what is considered 'research misconduct', and what is not.

In this doctoral dissertation, I aim to investigate whether there exist cultural differences in research misconduct, and if any, how these cultural differences are presented and function in the ethical decision making of research activities. In this doctoral study, I used a mixmethod approach in this dissertation to examine the cultural differences in research misconduct between China and the Flanders of Belgium. The first study employs a questionnaire to compare the acceptability towards irresponsible research practices; the second one engages researchers from two countries in in-depth interviews to explore their views on this issue; and the third study compares the institutional policies that deal with research misconduct in China and Europe. These studies have identified some cultural differences in the scientists' perspectives and attitudes, which are related to their cultural propensities and local research cultures. Though culture doesn't determine research misconduct, it does shape differing views and attitudes. In short, this research confirms the role of culture in the discussion on research misconduct.

Identifying cultural influences on research misconduct improves the understanding of this issue. Especially, raising awareness among scientists about their cultural bias makes them mindful whether they might have a lenient attitude towards research misconduct or not. That awareness, in turn, improves the efficiency of measures used to curb this issue. This study illustrates the importance of open discussion of research misconduct, and avoiding discrimination against "other" cultures.