

THINK GLOBAL: An International Perspective on University Knowledge and Technology Transfer

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Next to their traditional missions of education and research, contemporary universities play a crucial role in the socio-economic development of their region and country by delivering knowledge and technologies. Internationalization of academia has driven universities to add international dimensions to these missions. While this is especially true for the education and research missions (e.g. international research projects, joint publications, summer schools, international curricula etc.), adding an international dimension to the knowledge and technology transfer mission did not receive similar attention. Taking China as empirical setting, we aim to uncover and study the emergence of university knowledge and technology transfer between the West and China. We pay particular attention to the role of knowledge and networks in our theoretical development and we make use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

In China, university knowledge and technology transfer is in a state of uncertainty as top-down support and initiatives are numerous, but lower-level support and engagement is hampered, especially when it comes to commercialization. Knowledge collaborations, through co-patenting, show to be a way to strengthen and develop the university position and knowledge and to overcome the underdevelopment of certain regions. We find that international academic mobility, as a knowledge transfer mechanism, is an important way to gain interpersonal networks and entrepreneurial knowledge. In such case, academics benefit from establishing structurally broad rather than relationally strong interpersonal networks abroad. When it comes to the more commercially-oriented international initiatives, we find that China and the West have contrasting entry points and pathways to engage in the transfer of technologies. We extend our conceptual models with the idea that entrepreneurial knowledge, gained internationally, may boost academic entrepreneurship and with insights on the role of trust in international knowledge transfer collaborations.

Overall, our findings provide evidence and insights to the emergence and relevance of international university knowledge and technology transfer as precedent and complement to traditional knowledge and technology transfer. We translate our findings into practical implications both for universities and policy makers to engage in international university knowledge and technology transfer.