Professional identities of lecturers in three international universities in Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia: multilingual professionals at work

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of internationalisation on the professional identities of lecturers at three international universities in Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia. Higher education in SE Asia faces significant pressures to change because of the potential dissonance between emerging forms of global competition between higher education Institutions and established conceptualisations of higher education. We examine how, during focus groups, lecturers negotiated contested understandings of being an international professional; in all three institutions, they conveyed a pragmatic understanding of the relationship between financially-driven internationalisation agendas, their own personal belief systems and the realities of their multilingual pedagogic practices. The extent to which being international was the primary normative identity for academics differed across locales and there were different competing sources of professionalism. We propose a 'cline of internationalism', which allows us to conceptualise restrictions placed upon academics' agency to pursue an actively international professional identity.

Keywords: international; internationalisation; professional identity; multilingual; higher education

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Introduction

The numbers of international students studying worldwide continue to rise, estimated by the OECD to reach a total of eight million by 2025 (Karzunina et al. 2017). This 'step change in international activity' (Ennew and Greenaway 2012, 1) began in the 1990s in western HE (Higher Education) and continues to be driven by economic initiatives to tap into global markets, the biggest being Asia which accounted for 53% of all international students in 2015 (ICEF Monitor 2015). Since the late 1990s, however, there has been increasing competition from HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) in SE Asia offering an international experience to students from the country in which the institutions are located and to those from overseas (Brooks and Waters 2011; Shin and Harman 2009). This has increased regional competition with '[n]ew countries and institutions entering the global talent pool and challenging the established position of the traditional champions of international education' (Henard, Diamond, and Roseveare 2012, 7) or, as Daquila and Huang (2013, 626) put it, SE Asian HEIs have 'climbed onto the internationalization of HE bandwagon with as much enthusiasm as their Western counterparts'. Alongside a relatively small number of western branch campuses in the region, continued internationalisation is likely to remain for the most part in the form of collaborations between Asian and western institutions, which (Richardson (2015, 2), the author of a recent APEC report, identifies as the 'preferred form of HEI mobility' in the region.

Clearly, internationalisation is changing the landscape of HE in SE Asia. However, although there is some research literature on policy/strategy as we can see below, we know very little

about how faculty in HEIs in SE Asia orient to, construct and negotiate 'being international' in such contexts. This under-theorisation, and thus the timeliness of this research, is supported by the recent concerns of de Wit (2015, 7) that international can be an 'attractive' but 'vague' term and by Gu's (2009, 39) observation that there is a need 'to understand the purposes, practices and experiences of key stakeholders at all levels of the processes of internationalisation'.

To this end, we firstly contextualise our study by looking at the internationalisation of HE in SE Asia at the policy and strategic level considering theorisations of professional identity in an era of increasing internationalisation. The paper then explores how these four central changes have impacted upon the professional identities of HE academics in three case-study locales. We examine the extent to which their professional identities in each of these four areas are dominated by conceptions of being international, and to what extent alternative normalised professional identities feature in each of these four domains. After explicating the research design and the central methodological concepts, we move on to explore how the data that were generated. We conclude by reflecting on contested notions of being international, and caution that whilst 'international' may be a shared term across diverse cultural contexts, it is a contested norm.

Internationalisation of HE in SE Asia

Researchers and practitioners working in SE Asia document that some in the region espouse a desire to 'catch up' with the west (Margison 2012, 40) in terms of the 'repositioning of education as a commodity in global markets' (Blackmore 2004, 385). However, a tension between idealistic and consumerist views of international education in the region is also

attested (Chen and Lo 2013), as is opposition to western influence and the dominance of the English language in international education (Phan 2008). As Hearn et al. (2016, 214) observe with deliberate provocation, international HE has the potential to be either 'a wonderful mix of cultures, values and practices that teaches understanding, tolerance and best practice standards to all' or simply 'a money game'. Two recent reports on the region conclude that, although there is a good deal of variation in terms of quality, there is sustained emphasis on improving standards with a particular focus on a policy and practices, and the role that western partners can play in that agenda (Richardson 2015; Henard, Diamond, and Roseveare 2012). The desirability of this western involvement is, of course, contested, but, as Phan (2016, 3) argues, institutions in the region are 'intersecting spaces of knowledge, where the West and Asia can be examined in their "flesh and blood complexities"'. The countries chosen for our current examination – Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia – represent different stages of SE Asian internationalisation of HE. In their review of HE provision in the region, Peak et al. (2018) comment in their key findings that 'Malaysia and Singapore especially are global leaders in terms of 'domestic international provision' but that such provision in Vietnam (along with Myanmar, Lao PDR and Cambodia) is 'at very early stages' (p. 5).

Malaysia has the most developed international HE policy of the three countries we are looking at and has ambitions to become a global education hub (Ennew and Greenaway 2012). Richardson (2015, 35) refers to Malaysia as 'welcoming yet rigorous' in terms of its standards, while Universities UK (2014) reports that it had the largest net increase in international students amongst developing world HEIs in the academic year 2013-14. The number of international students in Malaysia in 2016-17 is put at 100,765 (UNESCO 2018).

In Thailand, the process of HE internationalisation has been a long and gradual one of westernisation – a 'culture of borrowing' (Lao 2015) - threaded through with the 'concern of maintaining Thainess' (Rhein 2016, 271). The main aim has been to attract Thai students to international programmes. However, these efforts have been criticised as being elitist as there is a 'perception of universities gaining fee income while the upper- and middle-class students gained privileges' accruing to the more high status international programmes (Lavankura 2013) and also unambitious in terms of trying to attract overseas students (Jaroensubphayanont 2014). UNESCO (2018) reports that 31,571 international students studied in Thailand in 2016-17.

In Vietnam, the growth in international HE has been more recent and more rapid, and can be seen as 'essential to the global integration and development of Vietnam' (Nguyen et al. 2016, 193). Having moved from a Soviet model of education to a western one, Vietnamese HE is in the middle of a period of reform designed to increase recruitment, both of home and overseas students, following 'a sober assessment of Vietnam's global competitiveness' (Harman, Hayden, and Pham 2010, 1). These reforms include private sector expansion and the internationalisation of the country's HE offering. With respect to this internationalisation, a recent survey of Vietnamese HE leaders (Nguyen et al., 2016) concludes that although cost-effectiveness and innovation were important drivers of the process, 'it was the transfer of knowledge and skills from foreign teaching staff that was highly valued' (p. 203). Numbers of international students attracted to Vietnam remain small, just 4,162 visiting the country in 2016-17 (UNESCO 2018).

There are no universally accepted definitions of what an international academic 'is'. In fact, it is still internationalisation as a concept that attracts most research attention (see Byram,

2018). There have been useful attempts to characterise what 'good' university teachers of international students do, what Sanderson (2011: 661) has referred to as 'internationalised practices'. However, this work does not consider the broader scope of an academic's activity. Thus, in terms of what it means to be an international academic, our interest was in the impact of changes brought about by internationalisation on the different roles academics perform: teaching and administration, research, and service. Following the recent argument of Yemini (2015) that understandings of internationalisation should be inclusive of all levels of education, we included research alongside the following areas of teaching, curriculum, and administration highlighted in Hayden and Thompson's (2008) UNESCO report into international schools. For teaching and administration, we wanted to explore the impact of any changes to the curriculum – such as the language of delivery and an international content. For research, we identified changes in sources of funding, research networks and collaborators, and sources of data as important dimensions that might have been impacted by internationalisation. For service, we were interested in the community being served and any international dimensions of this. Finally, we hypothesised that such shifts in role might have altered how academics saw themselves professionally – a concept that will be considered critically in the following section.

Professional identity in an era of internationalisation

Although the literature explored above has its main focus on policy, strategy and standards in SE Asia, in terms of the daily instantiation of an international HE experience, it is the role of the faculty, especially the teaching staff, that is crucial to its success, but this has received little attention in the literature. In Tanhueco-Nepomuceno's (2018) overview of best practice in the internationalisation of HE in five institutions across ASEAN, teacher and student views about best practice are collected alongside those of management, but there is no sense of how

the changes charted have impacted on lecturers' daily lives. To better understand this process, it becomes necessary to foreground the notion that the international experience is being mediated by lecturers whose lived experience puts them on the frontline of internationalisation. It is their negotiation and interpretation of this experience in the light of their conceptualisation of their own professional identity that will form the primary focus of this article. As we will see, it is difficult to define what it means to be an "international" academic as any definition will be both shaped by, and constitutive of, context.

Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) note that although the concept of teachers' professional identity has defied attempts at succinct definition, four dimensions recurred in the works they studied – the interpretation of personal experiences, the interaction between context and person, the salience of sub-identities, and the importance of agency (cf Sachs 2001; Varghese et al. 2016). Meanwhile, Winter (2009) suggests that the marketisation of higher education with the corporate priorities and values that it brings may lead to a schism between new and old forms of professional identity and suggests a dichotomy may be emerging between the 'academic manager' and the 'managed academic'. He suggests that '[i]dentity schisms in academe are gaining more traction today given the clash of values between traditional academic cultures and the modernising corporate cultures of higher education' (Ibid: 127). Whitchurch (2010, 627), on the other hand, shows how dichotomies such as private/public HE orientations can be challenged by the practices of 'blended professionals' who are operating in a third space such as the case of staff working in community and business partnerships. There is growing evidence that virtual networking amongst professionals adds another layer to how academics understand the contexts in which they work (Laferrière, Lamon, and Chan 2006; Lewis and Rush 2013). These two studies draw on sociocultural understandings of participation, as theorised by Lave and Wenger (1991) as membership of a

community of practice which may or may not be geographically 'local'. In such communities, as Aneja (2016, 589) observes in relation to teachers of English, 'the social interpellation, recognition, naming, and valuing of language varieties is integral to […] identity construction' (p. 589). Although the lecturers in our study are not 'officially' teachers of English but of academic subjects, they teach on English-medium courses and this remark is a reminder that in such international HE contexts, although English is the hegemonic language, its status, value and use is not uncontested.

When considering 'being international' we follow Bucholtz and Hall (2005) in 'approaching identity as a relational and sociocultural phenomenon that emerges and circulates in local discourse contexts of interaction rather than as a stable structure located primarily in the individual psyche or in fixed social categories' (585-6). In other words, in focus groups and all other workplace or work-related encounters, the 'realities' of academics' professional lives are interlocutory in nature, and are influenced by their orientations to the people they are with. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) highlight that identity emerges from interaction. In doing so, they argue that:

> identities are intersubjectively constructed through several, often overlapping, complementary relations, including similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice, and authority/delegitimacy' (598).

The salience of different 'legitimate' identities will be contrasted in our analysis below of international identities in our focus group data.

In the view of Clarke, Hyde, and Drennan (2013) this is a time of unprecedented change for higher education academics. Whilst we are a little more cautious about making exceptional claims for our own era, it is certainly the case that professional expectations of higher education professionals of all kinds have evolved significantly over the last thirty years. We

suggest that this evolution has occurred in four key ways. Firstly, the individual trajectories of academics are subject to change as higher education becomes internationalised. Secondly, the emergence of international markets for higher education is driving a commodified conceptualisation of higher education, and it is unclear to what extent academics feel obliged to articulate these shifting value frameworks. Thirdly, academics are seeing shifts in both the offline and virtual social networks on which they can draw for professional affirmation. Finally, in a globalised market for higher education, the relative value given to certain sorts of knowledge, for example, competence in academic English versus skill in the national tongue may be reshuffled.

Study design

Our sampling strategy was to seek out a range of national HEIs for which being international resonates. We did not want to research western branch campuses but investigate national institutions with an active international agenda. In the first instance, that meant identifying HEIs whose English language websites made claims to an 'international focus' in their mission statements. In addition, institutions needed to show evidence on their websites of the importance of 'international' in terms of staff, students, curriculum and standards. Beyond that, we sought to maximise variability in experiences of internationalisation by choosing institutions in three different countries, and seeking diversity in the kinds of institutions represented in our sample. Gaining access to institutions which fulfilled these criteria was challenging but we successfully approached three, one in each country, where we were able to meet with lecturers from comparable disciplines (business, marketing and economics). There were differences between the institutions that should be noted, although many details cannot be given without compromising the anonymity of the participating institutions.

In terms of the three contexts, in Vietnam, our case-study university was a large private teaching university that partners with a Western institution on delivery of some courses. It offers a number of undergraduate study programmes with emphasis on business, computing and languages. International students can apply to these programmes; however, only one programme, in business, is specifically designed to be international. In Thailand, we collected data in an established public university which has a dual research/teaching focus and offers a range of programmes from undergraduate to doctoral study with an emphasis on the humanities and social sciences. Designated 'international programmes', which are in English, are offered across all faculties. In Malaysia, our focus group-was conducted in a public university with a strong Islamic commitment. It offers study programmes in a wide range of faculties, again, at all levels. Programmes are primarily delivered in Arabic and/ or English, rather than Bahasa Malaysia, the national language. In summary, we investigated a range of both public and private institutions but all sharing a clear international commitment.

The focus group composition was as follows:

- University A– Vietnam
    - Focus group 1: five academics (all Vietnamese)
    - Focus group 2: five academics (all Vietnamese)

- University B – Thailand
    - Focus group 1: two academics (both Thai)
    - Focus group 2: three academics (all Thai)

- University C – Malaysia

- One focus group: four academics (three Malaysian and one overseas)

Although we appreciate that further details about our focus group participants would help to contextualise the data, due to the relatively small size of the departments that agreed to participate in the study, we are unable to include demographic details without the risk of identifying our participants.

The most striking thing to note here is the almost complete absence of overseas lecturers from the makeup of the groups. This is itself a salient finding of the study; despite general claims made about the importance of overseas staff to these institutions, such staff were actually quite difficult to find. This resonates with a recent APEC report (Richardson 2015) which found small numbers of international faculty in a number of HEIs in the Asia-Pacific region. It is also interesting to note that of all of our research participants none was in a leadership position. Although this is perhaps a reflection of how our research was viewed by the participating institutions, it was not an intentional aspect of the research design. The study followed British Educational Research Association (2011) ethical guidelines and informed consent was obtained. In order to ensure anonymity, all participants have been anonymised

Each focus group talked in response to prompts about external work and meeting people outside their institutions, whether being international was an important part of their job, how their institution felt in terms of its international nature and the languages they used in different professional contexts. We asked the participants to read the prompts in turn and to discuss. In all cases, we sat round a boardroom style table together with one researcher facilitating the talk and the other taking notes. The interactions were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. All of the focus groups were conducted by the same facilitators –

both authors of this paper. We were conscious of our positionality as Western academics, one of whom was working at a branch campus in South-East Asia, and we acknowledge that this will have impacted the discourse of the focus groups.

We carried out thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) using a set of a priori theoretical codes informed by the literature on professional identity reviewed above: a) personal experience, b) values and beliefs, c) contexts and networks d) prescribed knowledge and practices. Once each set of codes was established, each researcher re-coded the other's work and resolved any differences (cf Saldaña 2016). This type of coding was chosen as we wanted to 'expand on' the original themes (Braun and Clarke 2006, 84) whilst at the same time being mindful that the data we were coding was generated during focus groups in which lecturers responded to prompts in ways which they considered pertinent to our research interest and discursively relevant. Thus, the professional identities that the participants create need to be understood in relation to other potential identities (Bucholtz and Hall 2005) and their understanding of what identities would be legitimised by their colleagues in the focus group.

Findings

When exploring the four thematic areas arising from the literature on professional identity, we are mindful to avoid implying that identity is a fixed attribute that is revealed by analysis of certain dimensions. Therefore, in this section we explore how the participants discussed their professional identities in terms of various normative features. Being 'international' is one of these features and contested definitions of being 'international' were constructed in the focus groups. We will explore below how the major contestation that featured in the focus

groups discussion was the lecturers' personal conception of being an 'international' academic and their institution's prescription for what an 'international' academic should do. However, alongside the 'international' in different contexts, competing normalised identities were also negotiated, the nature and of salience of these varying across the different contexts studied.

University A: Vietnam

The key ways in which our four dimensions of professional identity occurred in the two focus groups we conducted at our Vietnamese case-study institution are identified in Table 1.

[Table 1 near here]

Personal experiences were invoked often as evidence of being 'international academics', with a particular attention being placed on both study with Western universities and on work experience with multinational companies. Their values focused on more localised forms of citizenship – personally, they tried to contribute to national and local needs, whilst recognising that there was a rhetoric of international activity employed by the university in order to sell its programmes. Their networks were primarily Vietnamese, both in terms of other researchers with whom they worked and in terms of their citizenship activity. Nevertheless, the importance accorded to Quality Assurance by overseas institutions in the discussion suggests that status is attached is trans-national activity, particularly with Western institutions. Perhaps as a consequence of the nascent nature of the internationalisation of HE in Vietnam, status is claimed for their identity as academics by drawing on both their own institution's 'brand' and also the reputation of an overseas partner university. In this Vietnamese institution, which is private, professional identity was strongly linked with the values of the brand. There is a synergy between the brand identity of their university – which they perceive as highly successful – and the personal value they put on being outward

looking, hands-on teachers and concerned with practical achievements. However, at the same time, the identities of these lecturers are constructed within a discourse which acknowledges that, whilst their institution is well known outside HE, it is less well known within it, as Extract 1 illustrates.

> Facilitator: Have people heard of [name of institution]?
>
> Participant: [name of institution]. In Vietnam yes. Everybody knows it. And it is a very famous brand everybody knows [name of institution]?. Outside however I have even paid any attention whether they know it or not so yeah if I introduce myself as a lecturer at [name of institution] everybody knows it.
>
> **Extract 1**

It is perhaps because of the dependence on the institution for their status that institutional definitions of professional identity imposed important restrictions on their personal concepts of being 'international'. The English language featured saliently in discussion of prescribed knowledge and practices, and it was clear that there was a tension between the professional practices prescribed by the institution and the participants' own ideas of the practice of an effective professional. In the following extract, for example, the importance of responding to the particular needs of the students on a particular day interplays with a more active, multilingual, international identity:

> Facilitator: Are you allowed to teach in Vietnamese or are you told by the management that you should teach in English?
>
> Participant: Umm.. in principle we are not allowed to teach in Vietnamese but as we need to improve the understanding of students we need Vietnamese as well and in my case I had use another language because apart from my teachings I'm studying PhD yes and I work PhD in French and I also use French a littles
>
> **Extract 2**

In the following extract, being ‘international’ is equated with being a more successful professional – it is associated with a raised salary, better teaching and the additional role of passing on linguistic skills to their students. In other words, the participants are espousing an idealised role of the international professional:

> Participant: I think being international is very important part of my job in terms of the teaching yeah .. and can get the good pay when we compare with the Vietnamese programme and yeah .. we can upgrade our .. my level about teaching and you can contribute to receive to send the knowledge to the student in English and you can help the student improve about English skills
>
> **Extract 3**

In the following extract, multilingual aspects of their professional practice are discussed and commented upon. The role of language was a salient theme across all three case studies:

> Participant: If we are going to be sincere with each other we're gonna talk in Vietnamese ..
>
> Participants all: [agreement]
>
> Facilitator: You would talk in Vietnamese?
>
> All participants: [agreement]
>
> Facilitator: And if it was a formal meeting so if you were meeting to discuss a course with that would be Vietnamese or would you go back to English?
>
> Participant: It depends
>
> Participant: We would go mix I think.
>
> Participant: It depends
>
> Participant: If we have professionals foreign professionals then we need to use English all the times but when only Vietnamese professionals we use Vietnamese! [laughs]

Participant: I think that the thing with professional discussion is we use a lot of English terms in our teaching so it is really back and forth so we most likely use Vietnamese to converse but then for some terms it easier if we just use English so we .. it's a mix really.

Facilitator: So you just throw in…

Participant: Yes. Just throw in [many people speaking at once]

Participant: Yes professional terms in English but to communicate properly use Vietnamese yes.

Extract 4

We can see in Extract 4 how code-switching (switching between different languages in a single stretch of discourse) and multilingualism are seen as markers of effective strategies by the group. But that there is a conflict with the professional practices that are prescribed by the institution – they sell their courses on the basis of their being delivered in English – and being 'international' is equated with delivery in English.

An interesting dichotomy is established by the final speaker between appearing to be professional – which necessitates speaking in English – and communicating effectively – which is central to their identity as an effective teacher. In other words, although they see themselves as an 'international' academic, they are sceptical of the assumption made by their institution that an effective international academic invariably communicates with others in English. At some points, then, they accede to this institutional definition of being 'international' but in other instances they actively contest this through their linguistic practices – in this instance, the institutional definition of being international is rejected because it is equated with ineffective communication. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) refer to this behaviour as the 'tactics of intersubjectivity' (p.599) which rely on a weaker or stronger

desire ‘to make common cause with’ (Ibid.), something that we will return to in the later discussion.

University B: Thailand

Table 2, summarises the four dimensions of professional identity that were salient in our two focus group discussions with the lecturers.

[Table 2 near here]

In this Thai university, a far stronger emphasis was placed on national identities and national pressures than in our other two case-study institutions. So, the lecturers not only had to negotiate the tension between institutional and personal definitions of an international academic, but also faced an additional institutional prescription to be a ‘Thai academic’. The lecturers spoke about a pressure to be seen to contribute to national priorities, with Thai publications seen as more important than international ones. National values were therefore both personally and institutionally important. Similar to the Vietnamese institution, some aspects of being ‘international’ were here equated with the commodification of education – it was a claim that enabled the university to charge higher fees for particular programmes, to try to attract students from elsewhere in SE Asia, and to assuage parental fears about language skills. In practice, however, both overseas lecturers and students were few in number, and there was a frustration that lecturers were placed under incompatible pressures to perform internationally as academics and to publish in Thai. For these individual academics, however, an emphasis was placed on international networks. In practice, these were somewhat limited as institutional support for them was lacking; in many cases, it was limited to trying to maintain contact with their former PhD supervisors.

By contrast, at an institutional level, professional identity meant both supporting national values and maintaining 'Thainess', a concept that was left somewhat unclear (cf Rhein 2016) on the one hand and facilitating the economic benefits of recruiting international students on the other. The tension between these personal and institutional understandings of professional identity is attested in the following extracts:

> Participant: I think that the number of international staff is very important because you have to understand that the incentive for the lecturer in Thailand is not think about the international turn(?). For example publication .. you need not to publish be in English Thai publications in Thai journal is ok. And we value the text book in Thai more than publication in English. For example if you want to get assistant professor you have to write the hand out in Thai even though you have a publications written in English. But they also value Thai material. So that is why we don't have more international staff mixing with the faculty member all the .. all the .. all the activity you do for respond to government incentive and then you have to do everything in Thai.

Extract 5

> Participant: […] and another thing is that you see the values of [name of university] is for people .. [name of university] is for the people. So every time we have to do publications you make a publication in English you have to say how is contributed to Thai? So they say 'Why don't you write a text book in Thai? Why don't you write [that ??] in Thai to educate people in public and why you just focus on international publications just like that. So the mind set of .. of our alumni mostly they say that [name of university] is just for people.
>
> Facilitator: The Thai people?
>
> Participant: For Thai people!

Extract 6

There is a tension here between the lecturers' personal professional identities and those prescribed by their institution. For these participants, the ideal is to be an international academic, which is equated with an English speaking (and writing) identity. By contrast, the ideal professional identity prescribed by the institution is a Thai academic identity, seen as serving the interests of the Thai nation and people, in large part through the use of the Thai language. In Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) terms, this illegitimises their identity as Thai speakers who are also international academics. With a tension between these two identities, the participants explained how they enacted their role pragmatically, believing that the institution reduced being international to enacting only key performances in the English language:

> Facilitator: So what about if the student is on the international programme and asking you to teach in Thai? Do they do that?
>
> Participant: No.
>
> Participant: We cannot do that.
>
> Participant: But sometimes the student will ask a question in Thai by email later
>
> Participant: Or after the class.
>
> Participant: Yeah sometimes they will ask in Thai.
>
> Participant: And maybe it is asking something about a meetings or whatever that he or she wants to set up with us here and then they will email us in Thai.
>
> Participant: And one important thing in class .. if there is a real international student in the class they always ask in English. But if all of the students class is Thai they sometimes ask in Thai especially for the first or second year students. Especially after class. But for me in my practice - I will ask them to ask in English after class.
>
> **Extract 7**

As also seen in Extract 4 from one of the Vietnamese focus groups, the lecturer's day-to-day practices require them to make decisions about code-switching which have the potential to put them in conflict with institutional requirements. In other words, it shows the contingent nature of their professional practice depending on the immediate discourse context of their interaction. It is also interesting (in Extract 7) that a 'real' international student is constructed as an overseas student, not a Thai student on an international programme – again indicating potential conflict with institutional constructions of what is international

To summarise, 'Thai-ness' was seen as additive to professional identity in the context of the Thai groups' discussions, whereas in the Vietnamese focus groups national identity – although personally important to our participants – was seen as potentially subtracting from their professional identity. On the other hand, this did not mean that the Thai participants could construct an identity without tensions. There was a sense in the focus groups in Thailand that the lecturers are de-professionalised as international academics when they speak in Thai, and de-professionalised as Thai academics when they speak in English, whereas these competing pressures were not experienced by our Vietnamese academics. This may indicate a difference between how being 'international' is conceptualised in these two cultural contexts; however, it can also be hypothesised that this is a consequence of the fact that the Thai case-study institution was a public university, and therefore more overtly committed to national priorities, whereas the Vietnamese institution was private and therefore more governed by market pressures.

University C: Malaysia

Our third case-study university, from Malaysia, was the sole one in which a non-national participated in the focus group – this was an individual who had close Malaysian family ties.

At the Malaysian institution, the primary normative identity, at both individual and institutional level, was not being an 'international' academic, but rather being an 'Islamic' academic. The findings of the thematic analysis are presented here in Table 3.

[Table 3 near here]

In contrast to our other two case studies, in the Malaysian institution, Islamic values were core to everything. Malaysian nationals talked about the networks they valued and their external collaborations, which were local and related to family/community. It was only the overseas faculty member who explicitly commented on the institution's Islamic ethos as exemplified in the following two extracts.

> Participant 1: So there is a Malaysian flavour to the way the University is run. When it comes to the values I think somehow the university is trying to stick to the principles of the Islamic values and I think that is something that I can really identify with and it makes this university different compared to other universities. I was also actually thinking about this actually the other day. I think [name of institution] has got this kind of Islamic eco system so it is not about being super Islamic individually but you are in an environment where Islam in particular is .. is treated as something that is important. And so in that sense it is always very you feel always very comfortable whereas in other institutions you can be a Muslim but you will be asked to do things which are maybe un-Islamic and everybody knows that it's un-Islamic but [just do it]

Extract 9

> Participant 1: I think that the other thing and I mean just looking at the question there is a number of collaboration that I was trying to establish but there has never been any comeback so I tried several times to contact researchers in the United States people at Stamford and people like that and they don't even make or

acknowledge your email let alone reply. And I don't know whether they are just too busy or ..

Participant 2: Too many invitations probably!

[laughter]

Participant 1: I don't know .. but even at least acknowledging an email would be courtesy. So I find that and trying to contact people who don't know you or your University can be difficult and a problem because first of all the name might put people off .. [name of institution] it's like what is that?

Facilitator: So why would that name put people off?

Participant 2: Probably Islamic

[Laughter]

Participant 2: The word Islamic probably and because of the recent you know issues worldwide[?] issues.

Extract 10

There is a sense in Extract 10 that the international playing field is not one in which every player is equally valued, but that there are inequalities in status based on others' prejudices against their religious identity. Together, the lecturers signal their shared understanding of the challenges of this aspect of their identities through shared laugher, which can be understood as a 'mobilized' rhetorical feature rather than a 'natural reaction' (Billig 2005, 179) which, in this case, shows an international orientation which is jointly understood to be restricted. This restriction occurs because of the religious identity of their institution, which is seen as impeding their attempts to network internationally, and to be active international academics. Although they would like to achieve both an international and an Islamic professional identity, in practice the latter places restrictions on the former because of how it is seen in other cultures, rather than because of any inherent tension. In the extract above, we see

through the laughter an awareness that the primary normative identity for professionals in their institution – that of being an Islamic academic – is devalued in other contexts.

Discussion: understanding identity on a cline of internationalism

Our research has shown that being international may seem 'vague' (de Wit 2015, 7) because the international professional identities of the lecturers from the three institutions are complex and contested (Winter 2009). Consequently, these practices of internationalisation deserve more detailed consideration (Gu 2009) with attention to linguistic practices in particular as a central element of that contestation (Aneja 2016).

In our Vietnamese case study, the main contestation was between participants' concept of being international and the institutional definition of being international. Whilst this was also contested in our Thai and Malaysian cases, there were other contestations that took primary importance. In the Thai case, the more significant pressure was to be a Thai academic, with being an international academic (whilst serving an economic agenda for their institutions) being seen as secondary in importance to serving the Thai people; thus the primary contestation was between their personal professional identity as 'international' and the institutional professional prescription to be 'Thai'. At our Malaysian university, the most salient tension discussed by the participants was between being an Islamic academic and being an international academic, with the presumptions of others about the former identity serving to inhibit the latter; in other words, the primary contestation was not between personal and institutional identities, but between insider and outsider views of their identity. In terms of the relationality principle (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, 598), these contestations

‘underscore the point that identities are never autonomous or independent but always acquire meaning in relation to other available identity positions and other social actors’.

Through these focus groups we have seen how the different dimensions of professional identity coming from the literature – personal experience, values/beliefs, contexts and the kind of knowledge that is legitimate – are presented/evaluated through a ‘lens of internationalism’ which indicated how they more/less measure up to a shared understanding of the international which is predicated on the mobility of students and the use of English. This lens of internationalism, we argue, develops from understanding Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) genuineness/artifice dimension as especially salient. For the lecturers, this means that their multilingual identities and practices (which are sophisticated and nuanced) and their alignment with their institutions’ values need to be constantly renegotiated. The focus groups (as speech events) are ideal interactions where exploration of academics’ daily discourse practices is legitimate even though what they are doing is at odds with institutional requirements.

We therefore suggest that in our study these academics negotiate their identities on a ‘cline of internationalism’. This is manifested in two ways. Firstly, through the ways that their interlocutory selves present and interpret the illustrative examples that they feel are relevant to the conversation. Secondly through the joint enterprise of discursive identity construction in the focus groups themselves. When giving illustrative examples or explaining their views, the participants construct identities which are more or less restricted or active, based on the degree of conflict between the institutional definition of identity and their own. Underpinning this is their individual understanding of what an academic in their particular institutional situation should or could do given the right conditions.

Nevertheless, identity choice is restricted because of a tension between different aspects of academics' identity. In our Vietnamese case, the restrictions existed because of a tension between individual and institutional definitions of an 'international academic'. In our other two case studies, there were further restrictions. In the Thai case study groups, the participants are restricted by the need to be seen as Thai academics. In the Islamic institution in Malaysia, they were restricted by outsiders' views of their Islamic identity. Across all three case studies, then, their own overseas experiences and views of being international have to renegotiated in terms of institutional values and practical realities (Winter 2009). This highlights two important observations. Firstly, identity is not independent of the social world (Varghese et al. 2016). The professional identities that these speakers create need to be understood in relation to other potential identities (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Secondly, they are both shaped by the unfolding discourse and constitutive of it. By studying this discourse, we can 'call attention to the myriad ways that identity comes into being, from habitual practice to interactional practice to representations and ideologies' (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, 608).

Conclusion

Much has been written about the neoliberal agenda of marketisation that has been served by the current ways in which the internationalisation of HE has been enacted (for example, Ferudi 2010). Although market pressures have direct implications for teachers' work – for example, through the possibility of intensification – much less has been written about how academics have experienced this internationalisation. This paper has begun to address this weakness in the existing literature.

We have argued in this paper that the junior academics in this study, who are at the vanguard of internationalisation in their institutions, are actively making sophisticated linguistic and pedagogic decisions on a daily basis. Although studies of HE professional identity in SE Asia are reasonably scarce, our findings complement recent studies of English language teachers' practices which highlight the dynamic nature of teacher professionalism in the region (Vu 2016) and the importance of decision making about language and pedagogy. Our participants were not trained or employed as language teachers but this aspect of their work, and their decision-making as multilingual professionals, is clearly a salient part of their identities.

We acknowledge that there are limitations to this study. Firstly, these constructions of being international need to be understood in terms of the 'showing' of international that was considered relevant to the focus groups (composed of their colleagues) and to us (overseas, western academics). Secondly, it is important to recognise that we do not have the voices of other more senior academics in the study. Thirdly, these data were collected in mid-2016, and already we have seen a global shift to more isolationist policies; it remains to be seen how these will impact on conceptions of internationalisation within HE. For all of these reasons, we suggest that further research is imperative, in particular a larger-scale, mixed-methods study to chart the impact of the internationalisation of HE across the SE Asian region.

In this small-scale study, we have shown that restrictions may be placed on active internationalism for a variety of reasons. The most salient restrictions faced by the lecturers in our study were:

- Institutional definitions of being an international academic that restrict academics' personal agency to define their internationalism. (Vietnamese case study)

- Other normative professional identities – in these case studies a national or a religious source of professional identity – that restrict the extent to which being international is seen as the central professional value. (Thai and Malaysian case studies)

To conclude, we have posited in this paper that academics in SE Asia position themselves on a 'cline of internationalism', a continuum between a freely adopted professional identity as an international academic, which we term 'active internationalism' and – at the other end of the continuum – a 'restricted internationalism' in which lip-service may still be paid to an international professional identity but in which other dimensions of their professional identity assume more importance. In all three case studies, we saw restrictions upon active internationalism to some degree, but overall, our analysis of this kind of pragmatic identity work gives us a more positive reading of the situation in SE Asian HE (at least in these three institutions) which is less oppositional than understandings of the European sector which foreground the values clash between the traditional/modern (Winter 2009) or the private/public schism (Whitchurch 2010) we saw earlier. The lecturers in this study also show a more positive understanding of their situations, and their capacity as multilinguals, compared with some of the cynicism reported in more recent studies from Europe (e.g. Schartner and Cho 2017). However, it is too simplistic to say that this is because these are new institutions although that might be a factor; we have to be aware that identity is not independent of the social world. Whilst international is an ideal for the lecturers in this study, it's not 'dreamy' (Ibid, 455) it is being strived for, renegotiated and redefined in a nuanced and pragmatic way.

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