

MASTER'S THESIS

Ritual as communication in academic organizations: a case analysis of a Chinese institution

Wang, Dongxia

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Ritual as Communication in Academic Organizations:

A Case Analysis of a Chinese Institution

WANG Dongxia

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ABSTRACT

This study identifies the organizational culture of a Chinese academic institution through the lens of rituals. It attempts to reveal the dynamic and complex organizational reality some Chinese universities are undergoing. Existing literature suggests ritual being an aggregate of cultural forms provides a practical and comprehensive approach to explore an organization's culture. Moreover, the fact that universities are replete with ritualistic activities makes a sound ground for the study of rituals. Following an interpretive perspective, two issues were investigated in relation to the culture: what messages and meanings the organizational member interpreted from the rituals and through what means these messages and meanings are communicated. By employing historical document analysis, participant-observation and interviewing methods, categories and themes of meanings were generated and led to the discovery of core values and beliefs, the cultural dimensions as well as conflicting norms of this organization. Research findings indicate that in the changing environment of Chinese higher education, organizational priority is given to academic competence, professional service and team spirit. Bureaucratic structure is still prevailing in universities but it has a degree of decentralization in the aspect of communication, decision-making and hierarchy. Internal tensions stem from the institutional reform and the emergence of diversified composition of organizational members. This research also identified 11 types of rituals in academic institutions. Finally, discussion was developed on ritual's structure and its function in revealing organizational changes, and the contributing factors to an academic organization's culture.

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgement.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables.....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
List of Appendices.....	viii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background and Purpose of Study	3
Literature Review.....	6
Organizational Culture	6
Ritual as Communication in Organizations	15
Organizational Culture in Higher Education	21
Research Purpose and Research Questions.....	27
CHAPTER II RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	29
Case Selected for Analysis.....	29
Methods	29
Historical Documentation.....	30
Participant-field Observation.....	38
Interview and Focus Group Interview.....	41
CHAPTER III RESULTS AND FINDINGS	46
Results of Document Analysis.....	46

Density of Rituals	46
Frequency of Ritual Types	47
Participation of Rituals	49
Value Orientations	51
Findings and Analysis of Observations.....	53
A Typical Ritual: Alumni Reunion Day.....	53
Cultural Messages Within Symbols, Metaphors and Stories.....	58
Themes of Meaning	64
Findings of Interviews	70
Types of Rituals.....	89
Summary of Findings.....	105
CHAPTER IV DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	108
The Culture of the School.....	108
Core Values	108
Other Cultural Dimensions.....	115
Rituals Reveal Organizational Changes	123
Discussion.....	126
Limitations	129
Suggestions for Future Research	131
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	133
APPENDICES.....	151
CURRICULUM VITAE	161