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Aligning for Transformational Cross-Border Partnership: A Case of Sino-U.S. University Partnership
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Abstract

By using the concept of “alignment,” this case study explores how a Sino-U.S. university partnership creates university transformation through the multitude of interconnections both within and between the two universities. The study investigates how the contextualized alignments of both universities co-shape and are impacted by the partnership, and how university transformation is initiated and expanded during such interaction. Qualitative data were collected from documentation and semistructured interviews with 22 partnership participants from two universities. Findings show that the U.S. university’s loose and diffused internal alignment is beneficial to individual-level learning and change, however, loose diffuse internal alignment hampers the university’s ability to align strong silos to expand such learning and impact change on an institutional level. The Chinese university, however, features a tight, unidirectional and almost exclusive alignment to the central government

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which ensures efficient planning, implementation and resource allocation originating from top-down initiatives during the partnership. However, this close alignment to the central government also leads to either restricted human agency or intentional misalignment with prevailing institutional norms in bottom-up initiatives. The former impedes the generation of individual learning and change, while the latter hampers expansion at the university level. The study develops a typology to examine and explain the process during which university transformations transpire and expand amid alignments in the partnering process. Implications for developing a theory to explain the process and practice of cross-border university partnerships as relationship-oriented and extending beyond the dominant managerial framework are discussed. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)